


"I love being at home, but if I want to continue my studies, I'll have to leave the community as there's no college. Does that mean I won't come back?"

(Poline Bala when 12 years old)

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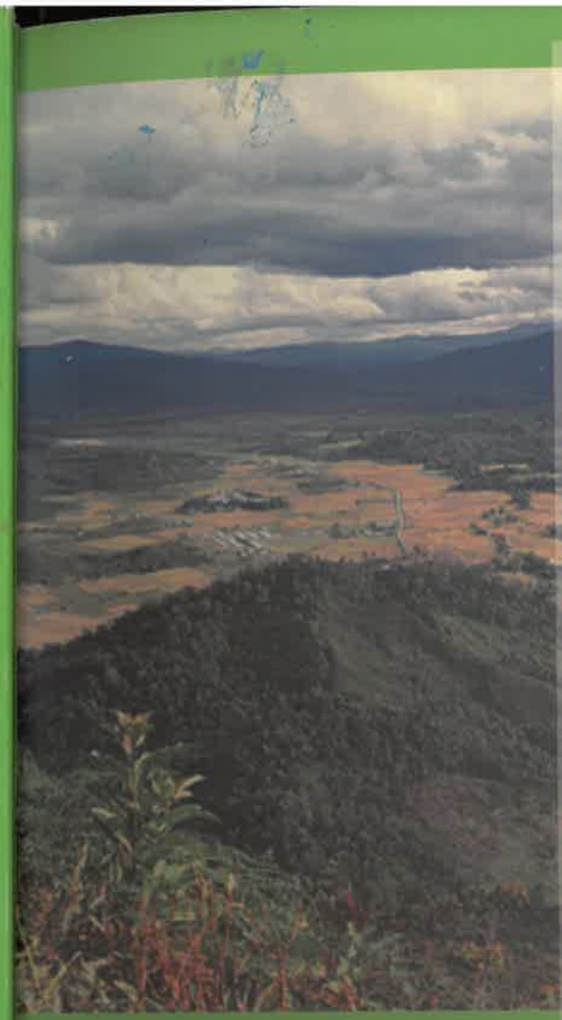

CHANGING BORDERS AND IDENTITIES IN THE KELABIT HIGHLANDS

Anthropological Reflections on Growing Up in a Kelabit Village Near the International Border

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The author is a Lecturer, Faculty of Social Sciences, in the International Studies Program, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

The central topic of this book is the international border between Indonesia and Malaysia and its changing and evolving significance to the peoples of the Kelabit Highlands.

Playing upon the multiple meanings inherent in the notions of "boundaries" and "borders," and of the role they play in creating and mediating identities, the author relates the account of the international border to her own odyssey from a Kelabit Highlands childhood to becoming an anthropologist and university lecturer.

Changing Borders and Identities in the Kelabit Highlands: Anthropological Reflections on Growing Up near an International Border

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Dedicated to *Tama'*, *Sina'* and to all the *Lun Ngered* in the Kelabit Highlands. Many of you have left to be with the Lord. *Pelaba Da'at ali ngih Bario* (It's very lonesome in Bario) without you all. May this work be the beginning of many more efforts to record the marks you all have left in our hearts. Your heads are like a library stored with rich information. As for me, I treasure those moments I spent listening and recording your life stories, your knowledge and wisdom. From the depth of my heart,

mula' mula' terima kasih

Foreword

Dayak Studies and the Contemporary Society Series

The Dayak Studies Program was inaugurated at the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak in January 2001. Constituted within the Institute of East Asian Studies, and sustained by an endowment from the Dayak Cultural Foundation, the program was established for the purpose of promoting long-term research on issues confronting the Dayak communities of Sarawak and of the island of Borneo more generally.

In this connection, the Dayak Studies Program has initiated two publication series: 1) a Contemporary Society Series, and 2) an Oral Literature Series (the latter comprised of volumes devoted to folktales, stories, oral epics and historical narratives, published in both the original vernacular language and English translation).

About the Dayak Studies Contemporary Society Series

Dayak communities comprise a major component of the population of Sarawak. They also form a critical part of the population of the neighboring Kalimantan provinces of Indonesia and, indeed, of the entire island of Borneo. The term Dayak has been used in a variety of different ways. Here, we use the term, in a general sense, to refer to the diverse non-Malay, or non-Muslim, indigenous communities of Borneo. These communities, it must be stressed, are highly diverse and differ from one another, in some cases strikingly so, in language, culture, society, and religion.

Although various aspects of traditional Dayak society and culture have been investigated by anthropologists, linguists, historians and others, with extremely rich results, there are a number of issues facing contemporary Dayak communities that warrant close examination. The Dayak Cultural Foundation, in endowing the Dayak Studies Chair, highlighted a number of these concerns. Among them, the Foundation called for research and publication aimed at contributing to a better understanding of such diverse issues as, for example, employment, poverty, and income distribution; the role and continuing identity of Dayak communities; and relations between various Dayak peoples, and coastal and urban populations, making up the modern nation states of the region.

The Dayak Studies Contemporary Society Series was established for the specific purpose of addressing these and related concerns. Consisting of data papers, timely reports and monographs, the series is meant to report on the results of research or comparative analysis directly related to such issues as they affect the everyday life and well-being of the present-day Dayak peoples of Sarawak and beyond.

About Changing Borders and Identities

It is a special pleasure to inaugurate the Contemporary Society Series with Poline Bala's penetrating study of *Changing Borders and Identities in the Kelabit Highlands*.

Over twenty years ago, when I was teaching anthropology at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, I had the good fortune to have as a student a bright young Kelabit social science undergraduate named Yahya Talla. During his final year holidays, Yahya began an ethnographic study of his own Highlands community. He wrote up the results as a substantial 500-page "Provisional Research Report," which, despite its provisional nature, stood for a number of years as the most accurate and comprehensive account then available of the post-Independence Kelabit community of Sarawak.

Like Poline Bala, Yahya Talla, too, drew on the experiences of his father, aunts, uncles and others, to produce an intimate account of the changing life of his people in the Kelabit Highlands. In a brief way, he also pointed up the significance of the international border in creating a growing cleavage between the Sarawak Kelabit and their Berian kinsmen in East Kalimantan.

In this book, Poline Bala goes much further, and, fittingly, makes the border and its evolving significance to the peoples of the Highlands her central topic. In a fascinating way, the story of the border also becomes, as she tells it, her own story. Playing upon the multiple meanings inherent in the notion of "boundaries" and "borders," and of the role that they play in creating and mediating identities, she powerfully relates an account of the international border that now runs through central Borneo to her own personal odyssey, from a Highlands childhood to becoming an anthropologist and university lecturer, and to the experiences of her people, as the Kelabit themselves have similarly become increasingly diasporic and urban. Along the way, she introduces us to, and so weaves into her account, some age-old Kelabit song forms, now re-adapted to tell individual stories of an ever-changing present.

Professor Clifford Sather
Chair, Dayak Studies
Institute of East Asian Studies, UNIMAS

Postscript

Having given editorial assistance to Poline in the ongoing process of this book's development, I wanted to add a few words to the foreword.

Although this study clearly fits within the discipline of anthropology, it is unusual in that the stylistic medium through which much of the information is conveyed is the narrative—not only the stories of the informants, but also the author's own stories are given. Poline writes that in the longhouse where she grew up, knowledge was passed on through the art forms of songs and stories: she continues in this Kelabit story-telling tradition, then filters her reflections on this material—including matters highly colored by intense personal feelings—through an anthropological lens with the goal of objective, open-minded examination and clear reporting of her findings.

Louise Klemperer Sather

Acknowledgements

I can hardly believe that I have finally finished writing this book. It took me quite some time to complete it. As with many major undertakings, this would have been an impossible task without the inspiration and the support of many who have contributed in ways known and unknown to the writing of this book. This is my first book. There are so many people I want to thank, and I am indebted to many dear friends, colleagues and relatives in the birthing of this work. It has taken many years.

First, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to many academic advisors that have contributed towards developing my intellectual thinking about the Kelabit. Here, I would like to especially mention Professor Shaharil Talib of University Malaya, who in my early years at the university encouraged and challenged me to think of the Kelabit situation within the context of the whole island of Borneo. Later on, Professor Shamsul Amri of University Kebangsaan Malaysia provided valuable guidance as I continued to find my way in the academic world. The late Professor Thomas A. Kirsch and Professor Jennifer Krier were my thesis advisors at Cornell University, and both were tremendously helpful and approachable. Professor Michael Leigh and Professor Clifford Sather of the Institute of Southeast Asia UNIMAS, have provided tremendous encouragement to get my M.A. thesis to be published in the form of this book. Despite his busy schedule, Professor Sather read through the manuscript more than twice. With his wife Louise, he proofread the text and checked it for accuracy of facts. I very much appreciate the effort. My Dean, Associate Prof Dr. Dimbab Ngidang of the Faculty of Social Science, UNIMAS has been very understanding. He understood the demand on my time and energy to get this book published. Professor Wan Zawawi, also of the Faculty of Social Science, UNIMAS has provided constant encouragement as I felt my way through in the research world. Thank you all for believing in me and for wanting this book published.

A scholarship from the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) enabled me to complete the writing of my M.A. thesis at Cornell University in January 1999. And, prior to this, a grant from the Toyota Foundation in 1994 to conduct preliminary research on Kelabit Genealogy made this research possible. I want to thank my university, the University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), and particularly its Institute for East Asian Studies for publishing the book.

Special thanks are due to many friends that have contributed in one way or another to the success of this project. Some of these friendships go back a long time, to the time when my interest in anthropology was beginning to bud. My thanks go to Mathew Amster, a friend who shares my interests in the Kelabit, and also with whom I have done some collaborative research in the Highlands in 1995, also my thanks go to Kelvin Egay, a relative and friend as well as a colleague who shares my dilemma engaging with anthropology as a discipline. I appreciate our ongoing conversation about what various concepts, ideas and theories to mean for interpretive discussions and explorations of social situation in the context of Sarawak. I am also indebted to my many friends while

at Cornell University: Carol Rubenstein, a person I could always count on while living in Ithaca, Allison, Edith, Mariko, Cattyann, Osman, Keithanne, Karen Fisher, Rachel and many others in the Cornell International Christian Fellowship (CICF) who have shown personal interest and support of my work at Cornell. My friends who happen to also be my colleagues at UNIMAS have been very understanding while I locked myself in my office to work on the manuscript. They have shown tremendous support by allowing me to experiment with the idea of looking at the international border from an anthropological perspective. Here, I thank Ahmad Nizar, Kelvin Egay, Mohd Faisal Syam, Suseela Devi Chandran, Noor'ain Aini, Wan Halizan, Ahi Sarok, Awang Ideris and Stanley Bye. You all are a wonderful bunch of colleagues. Thank you guys!

I am particularly grateful to Louise Klemperer Sather. She took valuable time to read and edit and suggest, refining my work with her unique kind of artistic skills. She deserves a special word of thanks. She has done a fantastic job editing the manuscript and clarifying my thoughts, and helped me to have confidence to present the material the way it is.

Another group of people that deserve a special word of thanks are the *lun merar* (Big People) or the *lun ngered* (Old folks) in the Kelabit Highlands. In fact, this book is dedicated to them for it is their stories that make the writing of this book possible. Many have spent hours talking and sharing with me their life stories, experiences and observations. There are too many to mention here, but each has left an inedible mark in my heart. Some are already gone to be with the Lord. I treasure every moment I have had listening to their stories. I often told many of these granduncles, grandaunts, uncles and aunts that they are my professors whenever I am in the Highlands. They impart to me wisdom and understanding, while my professors at the university impart to me knowledge and information.

I also record my thanks to UNICEF UK for kindly granting me permission to use images taken of me and my community for an education kit in 1981, "The rainforest child-Pauline of Malaysia," UNICEF Development Education Kit No.15. UNICEF, however, is not involved in the publication of this monograph.

I also wish to acknowledge Sydney Wee for allowing me to use his splendid photograph of the Highlands on the front cover of this book and for taking time to take photos of a few ex Border Scouts who now live as farmers in Bario. Thank you for your photographic records.

Finally, I especially want to acknowledge my father, Bala Palaba, also known as Pun Debpur, who from the beginning has shown great interest in my work. He has been a constant and affectionate support during my research and my writing. And my mother, Sinah Bala Pelaba, also known as Buren Mupun, has been steady in her prayers for my well-being. I also want to express special thanks to my late grandmother who faithfully waited for me to come back to Malaysia before she died in December 1997. My sisters and brother as well as their families have been tremendous blessings for me. I praise Him who grants me the grace and strength to complete this task.

Poline Bala
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2002

Preface

This work began in the form of a M.A. thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University in January 1999. It has since been extensively revised after much reflection and further observation at the border. This study considers the ways in which the international political boundaries between Malaysia and Indonesia on the island of Borneo have affected the everyday interactions, kinship ties, group relations and other communal networks amongst the Kelabit and Lun Berian in the Highlands of Central Borneo. It deviates from the conventional manner of defining political boundaries as fixed points in international relations in order to discuss state sovereignty and nation-building processes, and to study disputes and conflicts between states. Instead, it highlights specific significances and meanings of the border to the people living in its immediate vicinity. This is an aspect that has been relatively neglected by researchers who examine borders. For some of these people who live near boundary lines, for example, the Kelabit in the Kelabit Highlands, the boundary is less an issue of state politics and nation-building processes than it is an aspect of everyday life experience, of class, kinship and group relations, as well as of issues of economic and political differences.

The central theme is that the international boundary lines on the island of Borneo currently act as a new variable in what had been a fluid and changing situation of non-bounded territorial group interactions in the region. Long before the construction of the political boundary lines, the peoples of Borneo had formed political, social and economic networks and links that were defined by their functions more than by territory. These links and networks were extended over large and varied geographical spaces despite the rough and rugged physical terrain of the area. However, the construction of the political boundary lines through the various treaties, beginning with the Convention of 1891, has slowly transformed the nature of these links and networks.

An aspect which differentiates this monograph from many others is the use of my own personal experiences as part of the framework for this study. Although this procedure opens up a largely unexplored frontier, I sought to compare information I found in books with my own experiences growing up in the Highlands. I include stories, memories and just a few statistics in my personal data and combine or contrast this with information gathered in interviews, gleaned from books, observations and from other Kelabit stories and songs. I left the Highlands in 1985, and my longest stay since then was from January to May, 1995. However, I have visited the Highlands regularly, with my most recent visit being in May 2002.

Organization of the Chapters

In Chapter One, I describe my own personal experience in telling this story. I decided to put this at the beginning of the book to provide the reader with an idea of my personal stance as the researcher, writer and part of the subject of this writing. Bearing that in mind, I hope the reader will understand my position as I move back and forth between being the storyteller, recorder, observer and the subject, as I relate the story of the politically constructed international boundary between Malaysia and Indonesia.

Chapter Two offers a cultural and regional context for the Kelabit and their homeland in the northeastern part of Central Borneo. Within this context, a boundary line as a form of marker to delineate physical borders and to define a bounded place was formerly absent. But other social boundaries and connections have existed, undefined in terms of fixed geographical space. The neighboring peoples have formed networks and links that have extended over large and varied geographical spaces.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the Kelabit sense of social and geographical space in the Highlands, and how this has changed over the years due to various factors. These changes have produced new forms of cultural and social boundaries within and between communities.

Chapter Four describes the historical evolution of the permanent boundary line in Central Borneo, a process that can be viewed as a development from jurisdictional to territorial sovereignty. However, it was the Confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia in 1963-1966 that provided political significance of the boundary line to the local people.

Chapter Five looks at some day-to-day activities at the border and the development of my own awareness concerning the boundary. This chapter looks at the many and varied meanings different people attribute to the border line, and how the political boundary has transformed and differentiated the quality of life between the two neighboring frontier regions in the Highlands of Central Borneo.

In Chapter Six, I come to the conclusion that the political boundary line in the Highlands of Central Borneo acts as one of the newest variables in a long history of many variables that have affected the complex and changing patterns of peoples' movements in what is now the Border Area between Indonesia and Malaysia.

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CHAPTER ONE

Prologue

Telling this Story (*Mala sekunuh sinih*)

In telling the following story of the boundary line that runs through the Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands, I have learned that, "Boundaries are where one encounters others; they imply the recognition of others' autonomy and specificity as well as the realisation of one's own identity" (Oommen 1995:252). As I grapple with issues pertaining to the politically constructed international boundary between Malaysia and Indonesia in the Highlands of Central Borneo, I also grapple with notions of other boundaries as I tell this story. It is through this process of telling that I discovered, on both a physical and mental journey of realization, awareness and consciousness of "others' " identities as well as my own identity as the researcher, writer and part of the subject of this project.

At the outset, permit me to say that this story has been difficult for me to write for several reasons. First, not only has the context of the discipline of anthropology that I use to consider my own life and home in this writing shifted tremendously, but also, I have had to grapple with other notions of boundaries within the discipline while considering the subject of my anthropological study in this work. While the former presents me with questions such as where and how do I position myself in this turbulence of change in the discipline, my grappling with certain invisible boundaries within the discipline puts me in a difficult position to locate my own "bounded zone" from which to speak. This is particularly difficult since I am the observer, the storyteller, and, to a certain extent, part of the subject of my own study. I struggle with the problem of when to speak as an observer and when to speak as a subject.

Like almost everyone else, my first encounter with the field of anthropology was during my first year at university. It was taught in the Introduction to Anthropology and Sociology class, which was mainly to introduce new students to the subject. To my mind, then, anthropology was a neat and discrete discipline with a distinct and unequivocal way of observing and representing its subject of study with clear and intelligible categorizations and dichotomies. I was immediately drawn to the discipline since it has a connection to what is close to my heart – the desire to know and understand the social fabric and the dynamics within my own community – the Kelabit.

I was, and still am, curious about the cultural and social changes that have taken and continue to take place in my village and community. The village where I grew up has changed rapidly in its demography, social, economic and political structures. I wanted to understand the dynamics behind these changes. I was also fascinated by

many stories about the Highlands in the past—-legends, myths and life stories that contain stories of exploration and expeditions into new terrain and territories. These include stories of headhunting, trade relations, marriage relations, connections and linkages. But most important, I was curious to know the origins of the Kelabit in the Highlands, mostly in order to gain some insight into the Kelabit's identity as a people. I figured that the only way I could delve deeper into these issues was to study anthropology.

I was particularly drawn to the concepts and practices of fieldwork produced by this discipline, which I assumed would provide me with space and legitimacy to explore my personal interest and eagerness to understand these issues and dynamics. Hence began my engagement with anthropology as an academic discipline, which subsequently started me on this task of telling my story of the emergence of the physical boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia in the Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands on the island of Borneo. It is a task that involved an arduous journey, both in the literal sense as well as sending my thoughts traveling back across the years. Besides having to travel long distances physically (for the initial stage, between Ithaca, New York and Bario in Sarawak, and for the final stage, between Kuching and Bario), I had to walk down memory lane across the years to remember some of the experiences I have put on these pages.

Moreover, the journey did not stop there. I also have had to understand anthropology as a discipline —- grappling to understand its history and traditions as well as its recent development. Why do I need to do this? First, I feel the need to position myself within the discipline in order to be intellectually safe, sound, contemporary and understandable, and, most important, to sound academic. Like many other students of anthropology, I combed books in the library in an attempt to understand and make sense of the discipline. Through these books and also through my formal classes at the university, I traced the history of recent generations of anthropology to the time when Malinowski was living amongst the natives in the Trobriand Islands during World War I. From this experience, Malinowski produced his (in)famous ethnographic account of *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. His work, and especially the method/approach he employed, widely known in anthropology as doing fieldwork through participant observation, gave Malinowski the title, "The Father of Anthropology."

Malinowski's method subsequently created a research and representation model in anthropology that emphasizes an empirical agenda to construct whole or total cultures by making observations in a village or cluster of villages. It is accepted that by utilizing this authentic field method that emphasizes a systematic noting down of observations, a person can reconstruct the total culture of a community or people, and thus will be able to represent reality as a form of ethnographic realism (Stoller 1999:698). This method, and the writing up of ethnographic accounts subsequent to fieldwork, are widely accepted as valid practices by schools of anthropology, especially in America and Europe.

Like many others, I was initially fascinated by Malinowski's systematic observation model and was oblivious to its discriminatory strategy of "othering." It is a strategy that revolves around the idea of positing a basic difference between

anthropologists and those they study. Boundaries are erected during fieldwork and in the writing of ethnographies to demarcate clear differences between the observer and observed. As such, the distances, both cultural and geographic, that separate the observers from the observed group have defined anthropology as a discipline for a long time (Peirano 1998). Within this context, although the discipline had never been defined as the study of primitive cultures in absolute terms, it is obvious from myriads of ethnographic accounts that the "non-European other" excites the anthropological imagination. In an attempt to represent the "other" or "them," a boundary between "at home" or "in our culture" and "foreign," "overseas," "exotic" or even "primitive" or "non-literate" is created in these accounts. Obviously, these texts do not merely produce "native otherness" that is disassociated from the West, but implicitly reproduce a relationship between the Third World and the West by presenting the state of the former as a measure of inferiority. Therefore, anthropology is often criticized as a form of Western colonial discourse by scholars like Edward Said (1978), Spivak (1987,1989), Trinh (1989), and Mani (1987). In his well-known account, *Orientalism*, Said (1978) criticizes anthropology and/or ethnography's "othering" strategy as a construction to serve colonial discourse in its attempt to culturally differentiate the colonizer from the colonized. This discourse of cultural domination, he posits, is used effectively as a form of control over the Third World.

Although I do not wish to echo Said's critique in this work, his criticism of the "othering" strategy has altered my subsequent readings of not only Malinowski's ethnographic studies, but also of many other ethnographic accounts, especially ethnographies of non-European "primitive natives" of the colonized world or today's Third World countries.[1] Nevertheless, my first encounter with the notion of the "other" did not become salient through my readings of these texts, but came about when I first attempted to do anthropological research in my homeland in 1994. An anthropologist from the West told me then that anthropology is the study of the culture of "others," which is primarily based on the ideal of a long period of fieldwork and overseas research. As such, I was considered unqualified to perform any form of anthropological research on the Kelabit, a small ethnic group in Sarawak, East Malaysia, since I am, myself, a Kelabit.

The anthropologist's comments upset and confused me: I was upset to hear that my research was not considered feasible and was confused that the discipline excluded me because of my being a "native." Desperate for guidance and encouragement, I poured out my disappointment and confusion to one of my academic advisors. Fortunately, he encouraged me by suggesting that I am a different sort of Kelabit from those remaining in my homeland. His idea was that a Kelabit who resides in the city is different from a Kelabit in the village. Since I live in the city, he suggested, it seemed fitting for me to do the research as an "anthropology at home" project. How valid this suggestion was, I had no idea. However, all that mattered was that it provided an acceptable rationale for me to

[1] But this is not to say that I detest anthropology as a discipline or the work of anthropologists among the non-European natives. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, anthropology has provided me a venue to engage with an issue that has been very close to my heart – the Kelabit situation and culture. And I do agree with Herbert Lewis (1998) that anthropology has been unduly condemned to the point that the field becomes "untrustworthy," irrelevant, and, worse still, obsolete.

pursue my interest.[2] In late 1994, the Toyota Foundation awarded me a grant to conduct research on the Kelabit's cultural construction and use of genealogies for a Masters of Philosophy at one of the local universities in Malaysia. (I did not complete this degree since I opted to join UNIMAS with a scholarship to pursue a Master of Arts in Asian Studies at Cornell University). Hence, at the end of 1994 and early 1995, I went home to the Kelabit Highlands to conduct a four month preliminary study in Bario.

Interestingly, it was during this period that I first encountered a crisis commonly described as a "crisis of representation" in the field of anthropology. To my mind, as a member of the concerned community, it invoked feelings of disappointment, pain, and even being in danger, resulting from an erroneous cross-cultural representation. This happened when I read a few ethnographic accounts of the Kelabit, including a Ph.D thesis entitled *Rice, Work and Community Among the Kelabit of Sarawak, East Malaysia*. I was particularly alarmed to find out that the ethnographer (from the Kelabit point of view) had misinterpreted and misunderstood certain unspoken sensitivities surrounding a particular cultural greeting amongst the Kelabit —- *me apeh iko*? or "Where are you going?"

Based on Kelabit custom, the standard answer to this question-like greeting is, *me raut ngih* (destination) (just to play at a certain destination). For example, if someone is on the way to fish, that person most likely will answer the greeting with: *me raut ngih ebpa dih* (just to play at the river). It is an indirect or vague answer to "make light of serious tasks" by using the term *raut* (play), as a cover-up—-lest one be regarded as proud. Unfortunately, the ethnographer took the literal meaning of the expression *raut* (play), which is the same word used to describe "the play of children," and as such is considered fun, leisurely and easy. The ethnographer then decided that certain tasks like fishing and hunting are *raut* (play) as opposed to other tasks like farming, which is classified as *lama'ud* (work). In this reasoning, while tasks like fishing and hunting would be considered easy and fun, tasks such as farming would be described as onerous, admirable and difficult. Building upon this simple dichotomy, the ethnographer concludes that the Kelabit consider any person or group involved in hunting to be *anak* (children), whereas those involved in rice cultivation are considered *lun merar* (big people). With this framework in mind, the ethnographer then suggests that the Kelabit consider the Penan as *anak* (children), since the latter do not cultivate rice, but are involved in hunting and gathering.[3] Obviously, as a Kelabit myself, I was saddened by the ethnographer's simplistic and

[2] Although I was grateful that the concept of "anthropology at home" allowed me to pursue my interest, I was clueless as to what and how various developments in the discipline of anthropology had made it possible for me to engage with this task of researching and writing in the 1990s of the emergence of the boundary line in my homeland in Central Borneo. I learnt that different ideas and models arose in the field of anthropology in the 1970s through the 1980s which explored issues pertaining to research and research problems. These problems not only influenced how researchers conduct research, but also challenged the social sciences' concept of the existence of a value-free position from which objective research could be conducted, and challenged the conventional models of representation in ethnographies (For further details, refer to P. Stoller, 1999). These developments eventually paved a way for indigenous anthropologists, including myself, to practice "anthropology in one's native country, society, and/or ethnic group." This practice is also known as insider or native anthropology or "anthropology at home," (M. Peirano 1998:113) which, according to Peirano, has more than one meaning, but includes "the kind of inquiry developed in the study of one's own society, where "others" are both ourselves and those relatively different from us, whom we see as part of the same collectivity" (1998:107).

[3] The paper entitled "The Kelabit Attitude to the Penan: Forever Children" was presented by the ethnographer at the Extra-ordinary Session of the Borneo Research Council in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia in August 1990, and despite criticism voiced by the Kelabit community, the article has since been published in M. Janowski, 1997. *La Ricerca Folklorica*, Vol.34:55-58.

misleading interpretation and representation of the dynamics operating within the Kelabit community.

To my surprise, the ethnographer's claims and arguments did not merely produce great concern amongst members of the Kelabit community, but also evoked a response from them. It somehow sparked a debate, the first of its kind that the members of the community were aware of, on the notions of authenticity, agency, authority and responsibility in the representation and depictions of the "real" life experiences and struggles of the communities mentioned. The debate not only reflected a sincere concern over misrepresentation by "outsiders," but also indicated a growing awareness of one's own culture as a subject of reflection and awareness among members of the community. Therefore, a meeting was called in September 1990 to discuss and draft[4] a response to the ethnographer's claims and suggestions. The response eventually was sent to the ethnographer whereby the ethnographer was accused of misrepresenting facts and thus endangering future relations between the Kelabit and the Penan. The responders not only claimed to have a "wider knowledge and experience of ethnic relations among the Penans and Kelabits," but also suggested their rights as "insiders" to vocalize their views and to question claims made by the ethnographer on various issues.[5] In one of the general comments, they state,

> The response to this paper [the paper that the researcher had presented] may cause other researchers to consider the wider issue concerning the right of the subjects studied to their own views, or the insider's view versus that of the researcher's[6] …we feel that remarks made are misleading and we fear that in years to come, attitudes falsely attributed to the subjects studied may have a deeply damaging effect on ethnic relations between the Penans and Kelabits.

The complexities surrounding the notions of "otherness," "crisis of representation" and the dynamics of the insider's versus the outsider's point of view

[4] The draft is unpublished and entitled "Reply to the Paper entitled "The Kelabit Attitude to the Penan: Forever Children" presented by Monica Hughes Janowski at the Extra-ordinary Session of the Borneo Research Council in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia in August 1990.

[5] It is interesting to compare their response with Heider's (1988) "Rashomon Effect," a term Heider uses to explain situations when ethnographers are in disagreement because they look differently at the same culture. What is missing in his account of the Rashomon Effect though, is the importance of the subjects' views and responses in these ethnographic accounts.

[6] As a person who is interested in the discipline of anthropology, I assume that the problem was not so much because the ethnographer was a non-Kelabit or an outsider, but suggest that the problem occurred as a consequence of the methodological approach and theoretical frame of reference, which had been decided upon before the fieldwork was conducted. These research and theoretical agendas were determined prior to the actual fieldwork to describe, explain and categorize social life from the data which was then collected during the fieldwork. Thus, the ethnographic study was a work of 'fitting things into an existing framework,' basically in a quest of substantiating a fashionable theory. As a result, the work was deprived of a rather complex and positive picture of the community under study and of the Kelabit's relationship to the Penan. This was compounded by the ethnographer's keen engagement with the use of the complementary opposition method (binary opposition) to discuss and highlight the symbolic centrality of rice amongst the Kelabit by contrasting rice growing with other economic activities. In an attempt to emphasize the centrality of rice, the ethnographer categorized/dichotomized the community into several sets of opposing categories, such as male and female, child and adult, play and work, all in their relation to food production and consumption.This model has been significantly shaped by certain Western dualistic modes of thought, which generally have pushed aside culturally specific gender meanings and practices in smaller communities like the Kelabit. Gender relations among these communities are not particularly shaped by fixed differences between male and female, but can be molded or shaped by complex sociopolitical dynamics. These dynamics involve the intersection of gender-based norms of behavior with culture, ethnicity, nationality, knowledge and power which influence the ways gender relations are expressed and practiced in these societies.

become more apparent through some other unique experiences I encountered while doing my fieldwork in the Highlands. One of these unique experiences was doing collaborative work with another anthropologist, a non-Kelabit, who was also conducting anthropological research in the Highlands, and was then a graduate student from a university in the U.S.A. Since we were working at the same field site, we decided to do some collaborating. A significant fact we found interesting was the difference in informants' responses to us individually. This was particularly obvious in regards to their answering his and my questions. Although we both asked the same questions, some people deliberately would give each of us separate and different information. Besides that, their responses, or the way some answered us, were different. While some were very gentle and often used terms of endearment when addressing me, there were times when they would be very brief and blunt with my collaborator.

The selectivity of information given and the variations in responses and answers to our questions, I later figured out, were largely due to the fact that my collaborator was considered an "outsider" and therefore should not know too much about "us." Since he was an "outsider," coming into the village and community to study "us" and write about "us," some were sincerely concerned that he would write about everything he knew and found out, and consequentially would expose personal histories and stories that were too private and should not be told to the public.[7] There were times when the respondents gave excuses by saying that my collaborator would not "really" understand "our" situation, for he was not a local or a native, therefore it was enough to just give him some simple answers to his long and, at times, taxing queries.[8] Fortunately, my collaborator was constantly cross-examining his information!

Besides that, what I found most intriguing was the fact that some people were concerned about the idea of my collaborator earning a Ph.D "out of us," which subsequently would entitle him to a better living. Some even maintained the idea that he was gaining some financial benefits out of the research;[9] therefore, they considered the community as being *dipakai* or "used." These comments were not limited to just my collaborator. Months later, or even after I came back from graduate studies, once in awhile I hear comments and suggestions that "outsiders," especially researchers, are getting their Masters and Ph.Ds through the information that "we" give them.

Some of these individuals had personally approached and expressed their apprehensions to me. On the one hand, I could identify with their concerns because I was also disappointed by (mis)interpretation and (mis)representation in ethnographies by anthropologists in the past. On the other hand, I shared my collaborator's interest in anthropological research and his ardent interest in the

[7] The differences in people's responses towards us were also perhaps due to the fact that my collaborator was a male and I am a female.

[8] I was confronted with the same issue again in a recent dialogue pertaining to some problems and challenges we faced in implementing the Internet Access Project in Bario. One of the respondents turned to me and said, "Don't tell the person about our weaknesses [the community's]. He is an outsider and thus will not understand our problems."

[9] Contrary to this opinion, the collaborator, in fact, spent personal savings to make the fieldwork possible. The collaborator was "adopted" by a family and contributed food items, money, time and energy generously to his adopted family.

Kelabit community. I was caught in the middle between two sides—-my anthropologist collaborator, with whom I share an academic identity, and these others, members of the Kelabit community, who share my cultural and social identity.

My encounter with these notions throughout my fieldwork made me conscious of others' autonomy, particularly of Western anthropologists in anthropology as an academic discipline, and also made me aware of my own integrated identities. One part of me is a Kelabit, and another part, a native anthropologist; the latter by definition, means "the subjects of enquiry become the authors of their own group"(Peirano 1998:113).[10] In positioning myself as a native anthropologist, I found it particularly challenging (sometimes ripping at my emotions) to fulfill the demands and paradigms in anthropology— for distance from, objectivity towards, and abstraction of, the social facts being investigated. The idea of being objective when approaching a topic involves distancing oneself from the subject. It means studying the subject without being swayed by an emotional attachment, which may color or influence my interpretation or understanding of the subject. It therefore requires some analytical distance in observing, collecting data and writing about what I have experienced. This means putting up boundaries between myself as the researcher and describer of the social facts I am investigating, and my identity as a Kelabit, and that entails disassociating my personal feelings from the impersonal social facts. As a native seeking to describe a culture with which I am intimately familiar, it is not an easy task. I have to make a conscious effort to avoid any exoticization of the stories in my representations of my experiences, observations and data collected.

It is not only that I had trouble determining my own multiple identities[11] within these conflicting interests; I was also confronted with a dense jungle of texts, representing variations of research strategy, with different dominant theoretical bodies, and sometimes confusing, although helpful emphases on different elements in the texts. I found myself having to constantly negotiate my way through this jungle of texts. And the difficulties did not end there, for oftentimes I struggled with abstractions and grand theories. This I found especially tiring while pursuing my Master of Arts at Cornell University.[12]

Unlike my experience studying anthropology in my undergraduate years in Malaysia,[13] the academic tradition of arguing, challenging, criticizing or opposing,

[10] This situation reminds me of what Tom Harrisson (Harrisson 1949b: 65-69) once wrote some years ago: "It could be nice if they [the Kelabit] could write for themselves, but until early 1946, when we opened the first school, none of them could write. Now four of them have traveled a month to the coast and then to the capital, Kuching for teachers' training course. In a few years, they, who are natural orators, singers, bards, and moulders of words (as of iron and ivory, hardword and horn), may well be able to tell their own tale. Meanwhile, willy-nilly, it falls on me, the only white man so far to live among them and get to know them." Since Harrisson's statement, a number of Kelabit have written about the Kelabit as a people. For example Luun Ribuh (1955); Lian Labang (1958), (1962); Galih Balang (1965); Malarn Maran (1969), (1971); Robert Lian Saging (1976/1977,1979); Yahya Talla (1979), Lucy Bulan and David Labang (1979); Garnette Jalla, (1981); Doris Bala Lian (1988/1989), Bilcher Bala (1994), Poline Bala (1994), (1999).

[11] This is where part of Oommen's claim makes sense to me. Through this experience I realized my identity as an anthropologist, which is not normally part of being a Kelabit. While my identity as a Kelabit came "naturally" as I grew up, my identity as an anthropologist has involved deliberate and conscious effort on my part.

[12] I can identify with Behar's experiences in conducting ethnographic work and writing ethnographies. She writes, " What I do find tiresome is the habit of using whatever theory happens to be fashionable whether it is Gramsci on hegemony, or Foucault on sexuality, or Spivak on can the subaltern speak, or Bourdieu on practice as substitute for really engaging with tough questions posed by those whom we encounter on our journeys as ethnographer" (1999: 452).

[13] As mentioned previously, anthropology was a subject I learned during my undergraduate years at the University of Malaya. I studied the history of anthropology, its development and main figures. In a sense, this study included the concept of the anthropologist as the subject, which we scrutinized in our classes and discussions.

and promoting meanings or interpretations of concepts, theories or methods was not only puzzling, but created a sense of displacement in me while in graduate school in the U.S. There were often times when I found myself representing or being a part of the subjects that were discussed in classes, books and articles. This was particularly so when the subject matter of the study or discussions revolved around indigenous people and their cultures. These feelings of displacement were especially uncomfortable when the discussions focused intensely on questions of categorizations, abstractions of frameworks, methodologies, social categories, theories and concepts to describe, explain, illustrate and analyze indigenous cultures and livelihood, but for me were vital issues of survival for the native. Often I found that the subject matter, and especially the natives, were "displaced" or "misplaced" in the process of discussion.

There were also other times when I found myself struggling to be the observer, times when I was constantly grappling with questions such as where do I locate myself within the many theories, concepts and ideas, which are often abstract questions of social theory? What theory can explain my ideas? Which concepts or categories should/can I manipulate to represent my assumptions, experience and ideas? How can I illuminate realities using models of life which are divided into social categories, when these models are often limited in meanings, or even sometimes exclude other realities in life? I tried hard to locate myself and find my own path through this dense jungle of theories, concepts, categories and methods. I often felt overwhelmed and intimidated.

I searched the library for books and articles in quest of a theoretical framework. I also met with professors, friends and colleagues for ideas and advice to help with my dilemma. I was glad to know that some individuals did understand my inner conflict between my intellectual work and my sense of who I am. Making a huge intellectual effort, I strove to distance myself from the topic in order to be objective, but my emotions told me that I am part of the story and history that I am writing about. Issues came up such as how might my biographical subjectivity color my attempts at objective representation? Is there any possibility of using my personal experiences to give depth and passion to my writings? How can I separate my personal, borrowing Behar's (1999:479) words, "sense of emotional, ethical, political and historical connection to the intellectual project [I am] taking on?" In an attempt to answer these questions I turned to the idea of autobiographical ethnography,[14] which involves writing about the topic in a personal voice. I not only struggled to write this ethnography differently, but also grappled with, borrowing Bochner and Ellis words, "the connections between what [I] write, who and what [I] write about, and the rival moral claims that govern [my] life and work" (1999:490) It is particularly difficult to write with academic objectivity about a topic that has such a powerful connection to my own life, and to do it in a personalized way.

[14] I am mainly referring to anthropologists transforming given personal experiences, in the context of fieldwork or in the realm of the lived, into ethnographic writing. Other terms used to refer to this are "ethnic autobiography," which is a personal narrative, or autobiography, written by a member of an ethnic group, and "native ethnography" meaning ethnographies written by native members of the group studied. These different genres sometimes are categorized as Auto/ethnography. Auto/ethnography, according to Lepselter (1999:610), aims " to identify, perform, and explore points of connection between important genres of writing about self and society which can, in their openness, yield rich and surprising insights. It is an exploration whose effects vary depending on the essay, but which at its best here is both intellectually stimulating and emotionally stirring."

I plunge into writing this story in which my personal experiences and observations are featured using a personal voice, an approach that is quite outside the mainstream of Malinowski's other legacy to the field of anthropology – using a de-personalized voice in writing an ethnographic account. Since his time, the academically accepted model of ethnographic writing is by using a "dispassionate and distant voice" and avoidance of reports of personal life and emotions (Behar 1999:472). It is a writing technique which is based on a systematic inclusion of some realms and exclusion of certain other realms in creating an ethnographic realism. An obvious example is the exclusion of personal emotions, experiences and feelings from ethnographic accounts. In fact, an "invisible" border is erected as to what one may and may not mention in an ethnography.

But unlike the scientific realism model of writing, where works are purely "academic" without explicit meta-explanation, self-observation, or explanatory theory, my emotions and experiences color my work and writing. Nevertheless, I seek to be objectively attentive to the ways I represent these experiences and observations, but without resorting to "academic imperialism" in order not to offend other members of the community.[15] I especially aim to make sure that what is written/documented in these pages will not endanger the Kelabit community's livelihood in any way. (This is because I believe that being a member of the Kelabit community increased my awareness of how what I write could affect the lives of people.) I do not have the authority or the capacity to represent the Kelabit experience and knowledge as a whole: my aim is to represent my personal experiences as a Kelabit person in this text.

Unfortunately, while writing my M.A. thesis,[16] when I related my conflict to a dear friend and explained that I was turning to "personalized voice" in my writing, this friend exclaimed; "Wow… that's so easy! You can write about your personal experience in a thesis and earn a degree from Cornell University?" My heart sank! Awkwardly, I explained further: "Well, in fact, it is much more difficult for me to write about something that emotionally affects me." I struggle to put these feelings into words, which are too academic and abstract for me. Of course, what my friend was unaware of is the cost of vulnerability that goes hand in hand with maintaining the personal voice in writing.

One of the main difficulties in writing texts such as this one is to find ways to handle vulnerability and to write objectively without being too personal or emotional about my topic or subject matter. As I have mentioned earlier, since I have chosen to allow my emotions and experiences to color my work and writing, I will be inserting personal stories into what are normally considered impersonal social facts. I aim to transcend the opposition between the subjective, written self and the ostensibly objective, written social, and explicitly incorporate my subjective memories and personal experiences into the text. This is an enormous challenge for me, for at times I feel intimidated and overwhelmed at the prospect of inserting this material into the text, fearing criticism and humiliation.

[15] Grimmes (1998:5) once wrote that, "Doing anthropological research these days is like trying to walk along the top of a fence, always tipping from one side to the other, looking for ways to re-present people's lives without resorting to academic imperialism."

[16] The title of this thesis is *Pemanent Boundary Line in the Kelabit Highlands of Central Borneo: A Colonial Legacy*. A thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts (1999).

Not only do I have to deal with the dilemma of seeking to be objective and not being too personal or emotional, but I also have to grapple with my lack of experience with expressing my personal voice in writing, which requires special skill. An ardent promoter of writing ethnography differently, Behar (1996:13) explains what skill this requires and the costs it entails. She writes,

> It is far from easy to think up interesting ways to locate oneself in one's own text. Writing vulnerably takes as much skill, nuance, and willingness to follow through on all ramifications of a complicated idea as does writing invulnerably and distantly. I would say it takes yet greater skill. The worst that can happen in an invulnerable text is that it will be boring. But when an author has made himself or herself vulnerable, the stakes are higher: a boring self- revelation, one that failed to move the reader is more than embarrassing; it is humiliating.

Thankfully, I was not alone in my dilemma. There are people like Damrong Tayanin,[17] Ruth Behar and others, who have paved the way for me.[18] I am following in their footsteps; like them I am experimenting with the idea of blending my personal experiences into my texts. Hopefully this will result in illuminating some larger social processes while coming to some provisional and tentative findings.

Having said that, however, I still have to overcome one final immense obstacle, which is my lack of ease in articulating my ideas in a foreign language. This is not limited to dealing with English as my third language, but also with the academic language, itself. I struggle with issues such as how to express my genuine sense of self, using the language of a dominant and foreign culture to mediate that self. This comes up, for example, using the English language, which was the dominant language while I was researching and writing this project in a prominent university in the U.S.A. Perhaps this stems from a different meaning inhering to selfhood within two different cultures. Since my native community, the Kelabit, emphasizes communal life, the sense of we-ness is far more important than I-ness in influencing my idea of who I am as an individual. My identity as an individual is embedded in the Kelabit as a community (my I-ness is embedded in the we-ness). This is very different from the concept of selfhood that I encountered while studying in a Western country, where the I-ness is far more important than the we-ness. There, it is important that the self should stand out as an individual, independent of others.[19] Therefore, it is easy for a person from that part of the world to present an idea as his or her own idea, in comparison to a person like me who finds it difficult to present an idea and claim that it is my own without considering the other members of the Kelabit community. This is compounded by the fact that many words and terms both

[17] Damrong Tayanin's work entitled "Being a Kammu" has been particularly helpful. Not only are our writing styles similar (the use of personal voice), our background in many ways is similar. He is from the uplands in Mainland Southeast Asia, while I am from the highlands on an island in Southeast Asia.

[18] Another helpful work, although the author does not use her personal voice in her writing, is *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, 1993. Princeton: Princeton University Press. The eclectic approach she employed in the writing and especially the inclusion of local songs or chants in her work, has encouraged me to listen more carefully to our Kelabit songs.

[19] For further details on the relationship between "identity" and "self," and their different interpretations by Western and Non-Western societies, refer to M. Sokefeld (1999).

in the English and the academic language do not totally accurately translate the ideas that are in Kelabit. It is a constant struggle to have to translate my experiences from my first language (Kelabit), and sometimes from my second language (Malay) as well, into English and then, sometime even further into the academic language. In this process, an interface between the self and the collective is created and recreated through these translations and, eventually, through the writing.

Finally, when I embarked on the idea of looking at the political boundary line that cuts across cultural and social groupings in Central Borneo, I had no idea that in the process I would be encountering some other unspoken and invisible boundaries. But, as I conducted research, read materials, and heard stories narrated about the physical border in the Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands, these unspoken and invisible borders became apparent to me. These borders include boundaries among my first, second and third languages, between my native culture and the dominant culture in which I was conducting this research, and between my native identity and my identity as an anthropologist. I became conscious of these borders as I delved more deeply into my research and writing. I had to encounter two different kinds of borders simultaneously—-the political border line between Malaysia and Indonesia, and the borders of different languages, cultures and identities. Within the project itself, I moved back and forth between different "boundary zones," observing both my subject and my own subjectivity, listening to my subjects' stories as well as my own stories, but, of course in the end, I have presented the only point of view truly available to me.

My style of presenting my ideas in this text is no doubt colored by the ways I have learned to present ideas amongst the Kelabit—- not to convince and argue, but to provide readers with stories from the Highlands and my personal memories—- and allow the reader to reach his or her own conclusions. It is an empirical work and without much articulation as regards questions of social theory. But as the reader reads these stories, songs, and memories, all of which reflect individual life histories and experiences, I hope that they may provide some otherwise unavailable insights into the actual meanings of theories of social processes.[20]

I also would like to point out that not only are there different kinds of knowledge, as is claimed by Damrong (1994:10), but there are also different ways of acquiring and instilling knowledge, apart from the standard manner generally employed in gaining a formal education. For people like the Kammu and Kelabit, the oral story is a common way of passing knowledge, traditions, customs and other elements of their culture from one generation to the next. Therefore, I have woven oral stories into various parts of this monograph.

CHAPTER TWO

The Cultural Setting and Regional Context

The Kelabit Highlands is Home

For an outsider, perhaps, the Kelabit Highlands is a place strange, "foreign" and hard to reach, requiring a three-week walk through dense jungle, high mountains and deep valleys, or a flight available only once a day except on Saturdays, when there are two flights. It is considered remote and isolated, and oftentimes thought to be situated in the middle of Borneo, if not exactly physically, then psychologically (Harrisson 1959b: 4). Tom Harrisson,[21] one of the first white visitors to live with the Kelabit, describes the isolation of the Kelabit's homeland as:

> [a] far upland plain [which] can only be reached by foot, with high equatorial labour. There are just one or two places on the map of Borneo-and, more widely, on the map of the world – where you can get farther away from a known place– name or a good take – off. But there are few where, in fact, you can be more away from what most people call 'the world'. There are fewer places where you (or I) are likely to be able to feel more remote, more 'cut off' from the great outside…(Harrisson 1959b: 5).

Nevertheless, for me, the Kelabit Highlands area is familiar and "home." My home, to borrow Jacobson's (1997:123) words, "is an [my] orientation to the world." In a basic sense, it is my point of departure from which to make sense of the physical and cultural world beyond the confines of my homeland. Within this context, natural boundary lines, as a form of marker to delineate physical borders that define my home as a place, are nonexistent. Instead, it is a "place" with qualities which are manifested in the social and cultural interactions among and between the various peoples on the island of Borneo. These qualities, for instance, conflicts formerly in the form of headhunting, currently, trade relations or marriage and kinship relations, form important interactive links and networks among the island's people. While bounded territories were not recognized as autonomous entities to separate peoples, I suggest, rather, that mobility and trans-group networks created cultural and political links between many separate groups of people. This was not only true for peoples in the Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands, in particular, but for many groups in all of Central Northeast Borneo, as well.

[21] Tom Harrisson, FRGS, arrived in the highlands of Sarawak on the morning of 25 March 1945 when he, together with three others, parachuted from a RAF Liberator and landed in the Plain of Bah, commonly known today as Bario. The inhabitants, today known as the Kelabit, joined with Harrisson to fight the occupying Japanese army. The Kelabit let Harrisson stay in their longhouses for much of his time during the war, and allowed him to return afterwards to stay for long periods among them as a friend. Harrisson eventually fell in love with the Kelabit culture, and subsequently took a Kelabit wife. Many years later, Harrisson chronicled some of his experiences living with the Kelabit in his classic book *World Within: A Borneo Story* (1959).

Western scholars often view the Kelabit Highlands as one of the highest inhabited areas within what is oftentimes referred to as the upland zone, located in Central Borneo (Map 1). In an attempt to distinguish it from other areas in the region, the boundaries of Central Borneo are defined both in ecological and socio-cultural terms. For instance, Rousseau defines it as the area from which the Kayan, Mahakam, Kapuas, Rejang and Baram rivers originate. Geographically and socially, Central Borneo is the area above the rapids, but some groups who are culturally part of the centre have moved closer to the coastal areas, especially in the Kayan and Baram basins. For riverine people, rapids are social boundaries.(1990:9).

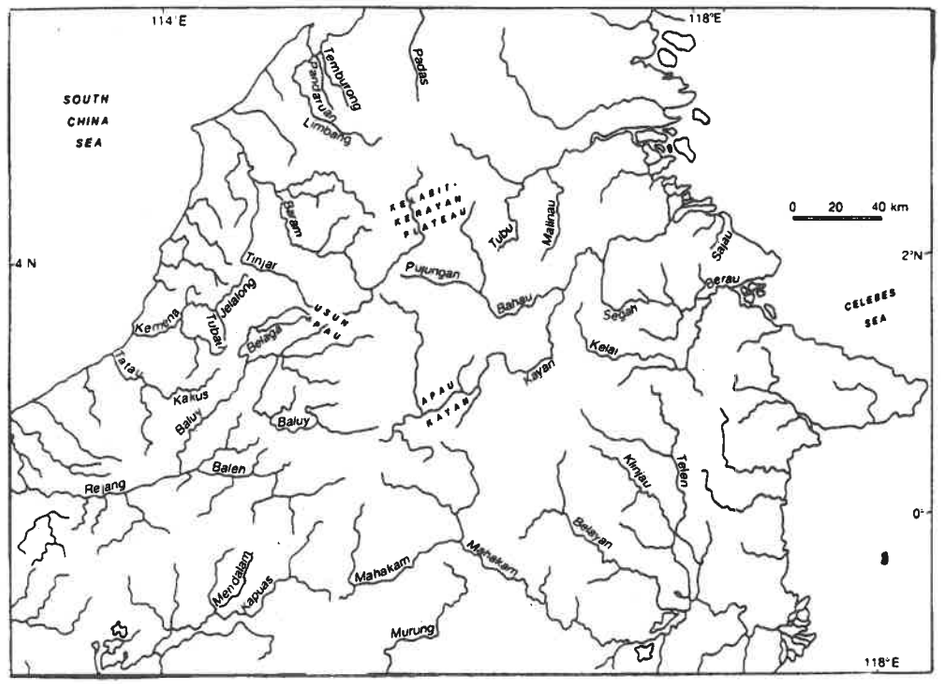
Harrisson (1949a: 133), like Rousseau, uses the rocky, rapid rivers to separate the peoples of the upper from the lower limits of Central Borneo. Since rapids are increasingly common as one goes upriver, they impede further navigation upriver into the interior, and so separate it from other parts of the island. In this context, the impassable rapids are not only physically constraining, but also form a social boundary between the peoples of the upper and lower regions. Therefore, the upper regions and their inhabitants are often considered to be remote and isolated from the other parts of Borneo.

Situated in the northern part of this isolated zone and above navigable rivers, is the region of the Kelabit Highlands. The Kelabit Highlands forms part of the larger Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands that extends between 4 15' and 3 20N and 115 20' and 116 E (Talla 1979a: 19). To be precise, it is a highland plateau or basin area with an average altitude of approximately 1000 meters above sea level. For an outsider, its terrain can be confusing, with chaos often resulting from the crossing and recrossing of ranges and streams running in all directions; and it is spectacularly rough, with rugged mountains, high peaks, and dense jungle, thereby making ventures within it almost impossible-especially for strangers.

Although there is no official boundary to define it, some scholars describe the Kelabit Highlands as comprising an area of approximately 2,500 square kilometers (Lee and Bahrin 1993:117). From an outsider's point of view, the Highlands almost appears like a great bowl (Harrisson 1954:104), enclosed by some of the highest and most rugged, but also most scenic mountains in Sarawak. Located to its north is Mount Murud, which at 8200 feet, is the highest mountain in Sarawak; while the west is walled in by the Tamabu Range, and the east by the Apad Uwat Range. Only the southern part of the Highlands is relatively lower, and it gradually forms part of the headwaters of the Baram River.

In the memories of my childhood, these mountains were too far to reach and too high to climb. They not only enclosed my home physically, but also defined my awareness of the world beyond those blue peaks and the band of forest encircling the area. I had never crossed those mountains, and I knew little or nothing of the world beyond, a world that beckoned me to leave home one day. While things within the "bowl" were familiar, things outside were strange. Hence, my understanding of the world was limited to within the confines of the Highlands, and especially to within the village where I grew up. Here, the *ruma' kadang* (longhouse) was central to the social, political and economic activities in the *bawang* (village). A village here could be comprised of one or more longhouses, and would also include the physical environs surrounding the building(s).

MAP 1
Central Borneo



Source: Rousseau (1990:2)

As a child, I used to enjoy living in the longhouse. This was because it provided a wide space for games with the other children in the village, and also because it housed a close-knit community whose members gave support to each other. The families in the longhouse many times joined to help each other with daily activities such as hunting, farming, building, cooking, or even providing food for *sakai*[22] (strangers or visitors). When one of the families in the longhouse had visitors, the other families would help by contributing cooked food, either rice or side dishes.

Somehow, it was the frequent arrivals of these *sakai* to my village that gradually stimulated my childish imagination and awareness of places beyond the mountains. I remember my first few encounters with visitors who were not from any of the nearby longhouses, but from distant places. This I understood by seeing blood streaming down their feet after having been attacked by leeches, and I knew then that leeches were mostly found far away, deep in the jungle. As a little child, I associated leeches with distance, for I often saw my father and my grandfather returning home with their feet either covered with leeches or blood after a day's walk, hunting in the jungle.

[22] *Sakai* is a generic term for strangers. But it also refers to visitors in one's home, even if the visitors are one's close relatives.

Like every other child in the longhouse, when these visitors arrived, I was taught by the elders, and, in my case, often by my late grandmother, to *peburi'*[23](greet) these visitors by asking the following question-like greetings:[24]
"Let ngih apeh muyuh nih na'ah?" Where are you from?
"Medting idan muyuh?" When did you come?
"Tuda' burur muyuh tunge?" How many of you have come?

Asking these questions, I learned through observation and emulation, was a simple gesture of hospitality. There were times when I was told to serve these visitors drinks and to invite them for meals, as was always the case when they were my family's *lun ruyung* (relatives) from the Berian area. In such situations, I was told to be kind to them. It was my interactions with these relatives that also roused my curiosity of other people beyond the mountains surrounding my homeland.

Besides our relatives from places beyond the mountains, we sometimes had *lun buda'* (white people) visiting us from far and foreign lands. I still remember awkward but hilarious occasions when we children from the village would try to communicate with some of these visitors in their language, instead of using sign language. We would attempt to imitate the way they spoke; and would say to them, "*Wes, wes, wes, wes.*" Of course, neither they nor we understood these sounds, but for us in the village then, it sounded like the white people's language.[25]

It was these frequent visits from the *sakai*, coupled with their stories, as well as stories told by my grandparents, that aroused my desire to know the world beyond my village. Although I often wondered what lay beyond those mountains and band of forests encircling our Highlands, I did not yet know that beyond them are ridges and furrows, streams and rivers, beaches and oceans, villages and longhouses, crops and plantations, tribes and communities, towns and cities. It was through these tales, and stories and songs from my grandfather, and eventually through formal lessons in school, that the larger world lying beyond my immediate experience became real to me.

For instance, it was through my geography lessons in school that I realized that the Kelabit Highlands is located on the island of Borneo, and that Borneo is the largest island in Southeast Asia. Five important seas surround Borneo on all sides: the Sulu Sea in the northeast, South China Sea in the west, Celebes Sea in the east, and Java Sea in the south. Besides that, it is encircled by a few major islands and island groups: the Philippines on the northeast, Celebes Island to the east and the island of Java in the south, and Singapore to the west. To the northwest are Peninsular Malaysia and the rest of Mainland Southeast Asia.

[23] *Peburi'* is an elaborate custom amongst the Kelabit. This is an important gesture performed between a host and a visitor, even though greeting people on the road (basically wherever you meet them), is equally important. The Kelabit have different kinds of *peburi'* for different occasions, and for the various events or stages in their agricultural cycle. Talla (1979a) and Saging (1976) documented some of these elaborate and lengthy greetings. They were often spoken in an unhurried and slow manner, and were regarded as expressions of a person's hospitality and friendliness to visitors in the longhouse.

[24] It is important to note that these greetings are not questions pertaining to the visitors' state of being, such as "how are you?" which, in some other places outside the Kelabit Highlands, is a common question when you meet someone, but, instead, these questions have a more geographical focus.

[25] I often wonder about the experiences of these visitors when interacting with us children in the village. Since our parents were always away working in the rice fields in the daytime, thus leaving the children to look after each other in the longhouse, there were many occasions when we played the role of hosts and hostesses when visitors arrived in the longhouse. We would also be the "tourist guides" and take them around the village and to the Salt Spring and rice fields in the jungle close to the village. We would try our best to relate to the visitors, and there have been times when we reminisced over these past experiences and had a good laugh at our mistakes and ignorance of other people's lifestyles and livelihoods.

I also learned that the geography of the island has implications for historical and contemporary human habitation and adaptation in the area. In fact, Borneo's geographic conditions are closely mirrored by the indigenous patterns of settlement on the island. As these physical conditions differ from region to region, they each affect the food, types of dwelling and economic activities of the communities in the various regions. For example, most people living very close to the coast do not live in longhouses, but in single houses. While people in the interior are engaged more in agriculture, people in the coastal areas are engaged more in trade or administration. These forms of adaptation to particular geographical features of the region contribute to the complex socio-cultural diversity currently found in Borneo.

Unlike Western scholars and geographers who usually use maps to make sense of this complexity and diversity, the people of the region, such as the Kelabit, use other means to portray Borneo's complex profile. Talla (1979a:116), a Kelabit himself, describes an incident where the late Penghulu Tamabu Tingang, a Kelabit chief, used the analogy of the tree as a metaphorical map to make cognitive sense of the diversity of the area. The analogy was invented to explain the different locations of the various communities along the Baram River. The chief claimed that Malays who live in the coastal areas form the base of the tree, while the Iban and the Kayans who usually live along the main rivers make up the tree trunk. Meanwhile, the Kenyah and Kayan, who mostly live along the river branches and tributaries, form the branches and sub-branches, whereas the Kelabit who live at the headwaters of the river make up the tree's flowers and fruits. Hence, Penghulu Temabu Tingang claimed, the tree would be flowerless and fruitless if the Kelabit migrated to other places or parts of Borneo.

Interestingly, although this simple analogy may be unusual to an outsider, it is akin to ways in which Western scholars usually analyze and divide Borneo's geography. For instance, both King (1993) and Cleary and Eaton (1992) divide the island into three major geographical zones. The first is the upland zone, which is shaped by a central spine of rugged mountains (Map 2). These chains of mountains are well over 1,000 meters in height and form an important watershed for the island, with most Borneo rivers radiating out from this zone, like the spokes of a wheel (King 1993:20).

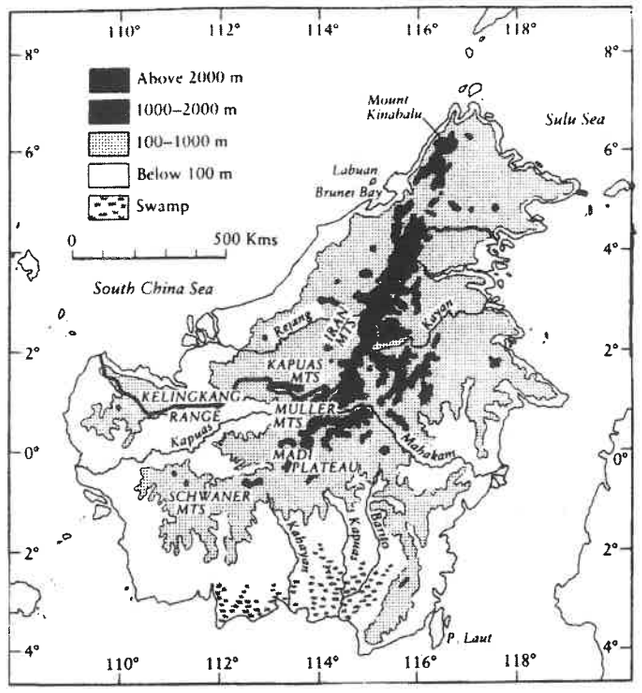
With the exception of those inhabiting the highland plateau found in this area, where irrigated farming is possible, most ethnic groups in the upland zone resort to swidden farming, as these mountainous regions and high plateaus are too steep to permit any other form of farming. In today's Sarawak, the groups occupying this zone are sometimes called the Orang Ulu[26] (Upriver people) and include the Penan, the Punan Bah, some Kayan and Kenyah, Lun Bawang, Tagal, Potok, Berau, Milau, Saban, Kelabit and the Kerayan people. Some of these communities are linguistically and culturally related. As mentioned earlier, rapids are increasingly common as one moves further upriver, and that makes navigation almost impossible from the coast to this area. Therefore, the main mode of communication and transportation for these communities is by walking, except where river systems permit otherwise. And, just like the other ethnic groups along the river basins, the upland tribes live in longhouses, or at least they did in the past.

[26] Another translation of the term is 'the people of the upper reaches of rivers' (Rousseau 1990:14). He suggests that the term is sometimes used to refer to the people of Central Borneo. In the past, it was common among the peoples of Borneo to describe a group in terms of location, such as "upriver" or "downriver." For example, among the Kelabit in the past, it was common for them to refer to themselves and others based on relative geographic position, *Lun La'ud* (Downriver people) and *Lun Dayeh* (Upriver people) (Amster 1998:29).

The second zone is located where ridges and furrows dominate. The furrows that lie between the hills and mountains become rugged watercourses which serve as important channels for the river systems on the island. These rivers include the Kapuas in the west (the longest river in Borneo), the Rejang River in the northwest, the Sesayap, Kayan and Mahakam rivers in the east, and the Barito River in the south. These rivers play important roles in linking the different zones, and provide an important means of communication and transportation in the island.

As mentioned earlier, in Sarawak, while the Orang Ulu people inhabit the interior zone, the middle zone is the home of many Dayak people, both the Sea Dayak or Iban, and the Land Dayak, or Bidayuh. While these two groups inhabit much of the lower part of major rivers in Sarawak, certain Orang Ulu communities, particularly the Kayan and Kenyah, inhabit the upper parts. This zone mainly consists of river valleys and their basins, and these more navigable rivers are not seen to be obstacles, but as a means of transportation and communication. Thus, these communities usually build their longhouses along the banks of major rivers and their tributaries. Like the other Orang Ulu groups in the interior zone, these communities practice swidden cultivation as their major economic activity, since the ridges and furrows are either too narrow and deep, or too steep to permit wet rice cultivation. They cultivate hill rice as their main crop, along with other crops such as maize, groundnuts, bananas and sweet potatoes.

MAP 2
Borneo Relief



Source: King (1993:22)

The third part is the coastal zone largely made of areas less than 600 feet above sea level, and it is mostly located in the south, southwest and western part of the island. A common physical feature here is the presence of estuaries of great rivers. These estuaries are mostly flat, composed of sediments irregularly deposited by the rivers. These estuaries "provided scope for settlement and farming, together with trading opportunities that were facilitated by a transitional position between the interior and coast" (Cleary and Eaton 1992:5). Therefore, major cities of Borneo such as Kota Kinabalu, Bandar Seri Begawan, Kuching, Pontianak, Banjarmasin and Samarinda, are all located within the coastal zone.

The Malays and Chinese are mostly found in the coastal areas, and this area is often the hub for trade and administration. In fact, many of the coastal communities are largely composed of traders and administrators. Since this region is the first and main point of contact between the people of Borneo and the outside modern world, the coastal residents are considered to be more "modernized" in comparison to the other groups in Borneo. Most international economic activities, such as trade, are focused within this zone which is made possible by the river estuaries. Some of these rivermouths become entry ports or prominent trading centers connecting Borneo with other trading centers in the world (King 1993:107).

The idea of ecological adaptation by the various ethnic groups on the island, to a certain degree, reflects distinctions between the coastal and interior peoples. This became apparent to me when I moved to study in a coastal city. On the one hand, there are some clear distinctions between these various groups, distinctions that are not limited to their surroundings, but also include their customs, languages and cultures. On the other hand, however, I soon found out that these groups are not each totally distinct from the others, with sharp, clear boundaries separating each one. In fact, there seem to be some shared characteristics or overlapping boundaries culturally and linguistically, including aspects of their ways of life, among the various groups as noted by Rousseau (1990) and King (1993). This is unlike the tidy classifications with clear differentiations between each group that I learned in school and through some Western scholars to use to differentiate between each group. In their persuasive representation, the world of Borneo is neatly divided like a "patchwork quilt," with separations clearly demarcated between zones and peoples.

My perception, however, changed when I began to notice overlapping and links between lifestyles and livelihoods of the peoples. For instance, the longhouse as a form of dwelling place is not limited to people in the interior zone, but is also a common form of dwelling for people in the second zone. Swidden cultivation as a major means of survival is not confined to people in the interior zone, but also is a way of life for some communities within the other zones. In fact, linguistically, many of these groups are related. One example is the Kelabit, who are culturally and linguistically related to the Lun[27] Bawang, Lun Berian and Lun Kerayan.[28] The languages of these groups are

[27] *Lun* is the Kelabit short term for *lemulun*, which means 'people.'

[28] In fact, some groups are closely related, thus their identities are interchangeable. In fact in certain situations their identities are hard to disentangle. For example, the Lun Kelabit and the Lun Bawang are often grouped under one common term by scholars like LeBar (1972:153), Douglas, Harrisson, and Hose (in Talla 1979a:9). As such, ethnicity in Sarawak can be confusing, and "an elusive concept to be applied to indigenous communities in Sarawak," as suggested by Kedit (1989:2-3). He pointed out that one reason for this is that different names are used, either by the communities themselves, or others, to label and classify a community.

mutually intelligible. One of the reasons, perhaps, is a probable historical background in which some of these groups possibly originated from the same group, but were separated into a few different groups as a result of sociopolitical processes. For instance, oral traditions indicate that the Lun Kelabit, Lun Kerayan and Lun Bawang were one people, but were separated and then labeled with different names for administrative convenience by the colonialists. Despite all this, these groups of people maintained their interactive relations and interconnections over the years.

In fact, interactive interconnections and networking between and amongst the different groups of people have existed for many years in Borneo. Moreover, it is arguable that geographic mobility with a high level of population movement is one of the defining characteristics of Borneo as a whole. Even though Borneo's physical geography obstructed formation of any unified empires on the island, its waterways have generated a multiplicity of political and cultural linkages between different parts of the island. The existence of waterborne transport has eased movement between peoples, cultures and ethnic groups. And these movements have included migration of people, trade and marriage alliances between members of different communities, headhunting, and exchanges of ideas, resources, people, and even slaves.

For me, growing up in the Highlands of Central Borneo, these interrelationships and interconnections were made salient through the presence of some *belanai ma'un* (old dragon jars) in my village. These jars were the T'ang and Ming Chinese jars owned by certain families in the village, and were extremely valuable, so I was often reminded to handle them carefully and with caution. These jars were useful for storage, and were especially useful during the *Irau Lua/Burak Lua* or *irau burak* (feast),[29] and also were important as a visible sign of prestige in the community. I remember my grandfather telling me that they were prized as family heirlooms, particularly the 150 pound ceramic jar with the red dragon. These *belanai ma'un*, I was told, were worth a human life.[30] And each of these jars had its own separate history and myths surrounding it.[31] Therefore, as a child I was told to avoid any contact with any of the jars, for it would be very costly to the family if I accidentally broke one.

But it was not merely the financial value of these jars that fascinated me. I was also mesmerized by the incredible journeys taken by the ancestors of today's Kelabit to bring these jars into the remote highlands of Borneo, journeys undertaken since at least the fifteenth century. Other items such as *ba'o* (beads), *tungul* (machetes), *angai* (Chinese jars), etc. also found their way into the heart of Borneo by means of these journeys. They

[29] *Irau* is a generic term used for any feast where everyone in the village is invited for the event. *Irau Lua/Burak Lua* is the old version of the naming ceremony which was held to initiate and pronounce blessings upon a child. In the past, the *burak* (rice wine) from fermented rice was served in generous amounts at the feast. The current version of the same feast is called *Irau naru'/mekaa Ngadan* (Changing Name Ceremony) in which many of the old rites and the drinking of *burak* are discarded. Today, it is an act of thanksgiving to God for the children born to a couple. During the occasion, the couple publicly announce the parenthood and grandparenthood names taken up by the new parents and grandparents.

[30] Harrisson (1959:27-28) has noted (from an outsider point of view) the "intricacy, elasticity and apparent illogicality" of the exchange worth of these *belanai ma'un* among the Kelabit. He notes that one old dragon jar equals one human life. Harrisson failed to clarify that the human life referred to is a *demulun* (slave) given in exchange for the *belanai ma'un*. And, giving a *demulun* away was always the last resort to buy a *belanai ma'un* since the latter could be exchanged for other trading items. As noted by Harrisson, one old dragon jar (if one could get it) could be obtained in exchange for five buffaloes, five fat pigs, three humpback bulls, two goats, two ordinary jars, two gongs, two fine parang knives, ten mats, ten fish nets, ten fowls, ten *Pa' Mada* pots, ten rolls of the best leaf tobacco, one hundred yellow cane beads and two hundred packages of salt. This was extremely expensive in comparison to the ordinary dragon jars, where one could get four of those jars in exchange for one male buffalo calf.

[31] One of these stories is about two *belanai ma'un* found by a man floating in a river in the southern area. The jars were believed to be twins and were talking with each other when the man found them. But unfortunately, some members of the man's family died as soon as the *belanai* were taken to the longhouse. As a result, the man out of disappointment broke one of the jars and sold the other.

were extraordinary excursions by boat and foot, which took at least three to four weeks each way. This was because the traders from the highlands had to *suud* (go forward and back) all the way to the destination.[32] In this case, each trader would carry two *babeh* (carriers). One of the *babeh* contained the *balu'* (ration) for the journey, which included three to four *gantangs* (15 kilograms) of rice, salt, clothing and other necessities, and the other *babeh* (70 katis) would be full of items for trading. To *suud*, the trader would have to take the first *babeh* to a point or stopover along the path, before returning to pick up and carry the other *babeh* to the place where the first *babeh* had been left. The traders, usually walking in groups consisting of six to seven persons, would spend the night at the stopover, and would then repeat the ordeal until they reached their destinations. A one-way journey had an average of twenty stopovers, depending on the route taken by the traders. Sometimes there were a few routes that could be used by the traders to get to one destination in the coasts. For example, there were five routes from Pa' Main (now non-inhabited) which the traders could use to get to Marudi. These routes included:

1) By walking from Pa Main to Pa'Mada to Ramudu' and the traders began to suud to Ra'an Luyu' to Lepo uwei to Long Beruang to Long Peluan to Long Banga' to Long Balung to Long Metepah to Lio Mato (Liyu' Ratu) and then by dug out canoe to Long Semiang to Long Sela'an to Long Muh to Long Je to Long Palai to Long Anap to Long Julan to Long Apu to Long Selatong to Long San to Batuh Talang to Long Kesseh to Long Pillah to Uma' Bawang to Long Miri to Long Laput to Long Lamah to Ruma' Ake' to Long Benyok to Long Ikeng to Long Tutoh to Lubuk Nibung to Marudi;
2) By walking from Pa' Main to Bario (Lem Baa) to Long Semirang to Kuba'an to Pa' Tik to Lepo Ngaber to Kayuh Bukeng to Pa' Gelaten to Buyo to Long Seridan to Long Mutan to Pa' Layun to Long Penyu to Long Bedian to Long Atip to Long Uwet to Batuh Bela to Long Tutoh to Lubuk Nibung to Marudi;
3) By walking from Pa' Main to Bario (Lem Baa) to Long Semirang to Kuba'an to Pa' Tik to Long Lebakan to Long Labid to Ra'an Salem to Long Lelleng to Long Merigung and then by dug out canoe to Pa' Aka to Long Seniai to Long Tebangan to Long Tap to Long San to Batuh Talang to Long Kesseh to Long Pillah to Uma' Bawang to Long Miri to Long Laput to Long Lamah to Ruma' Ake' to Long Benyok to Long Ikeng to Long Tutoh to Lubuk Nibung to Marudi.

Meanwhile, when the traders wanted to trade in Limbang they would usually walk to Bario (Lem Baa) to Long Semirang to Kuba'an to Pa' Tik to Lepo Ngaber to Kayuh Bukeng to Pa' Gelaten to Buyo to Long Seridan to Long Melinau to Long Napir and then by dugout canoe would get to Limbang. Whereas, when they wanted to go to Lawas, they would travel by foot from Pa' Main to Pa' Umur to Pa' Lungan to Long Rebpun to Pa' Rupai to Ba Kelalan to Long Pala' to Long Beluyu' to Long Semadoh to Long La' Pukan to Long Merarep to Long Mebaung to Pa Berayung to Long Sukang to Ra'an Sepalui to Lawas.

[32] Information gathered from many of the *lun ngered* in the Highlands, including from my recent interview with Pemanca Ngimet Ayu in May 2002. The last time he went on one of these journeys was in 1961.

Mobility And Interactions

In my attempt to collect personal stories regarding these incredible journeys, I often asked the following question: "*Tepu', Sina'* or *Tama',*[33] *kepah ken mado lawe muyuh me pebelih ngilad?*" Grandpa, Grandma, Mother or Auntie, Father or Uncle, how far did you have to journey in order to sell and buy in the past? The typical answer I received was, *"Ooo...Pu ayam. Mikat ngilad. Mado tungen - tungen teh lawe narih nalan kukud me pebelih. Do'o kinih maya' kapal teh narih"* Ooo…my dear. It was very difficult before. The journey one took by foot to go and buy was a very long one. It is good now that you have airplanes.

They would sometimes narrate their stories, and at other times would sing them out in the form of *lakuh*[34] to me. These are songs relating personal experiences as, for example, during these journeys. Sometimes they would sing certain songs which were filled with heroic figures and brave deeds, such as the *benging* and *sedadai*.[35] Some of these songs told of the pioneer journeys made over the mountains by my ancestors many generations ago. They describe their journeying up and over the great mountains and up through the high jungle, or even to the highest peak. I remember as a little girl how these songs and stories triggered considerable curiosity about the world outside the confines of my village.

These stories and songs are filled not only with their exploits and expeditions, but also with narratives of their dealings with the members of other ethnic groups in the region. I treasure the memory of my late grandfather, Ribuh Long, fondly teasing me by saying some words in a language completely unknown to me, whenever I asked him to tell me stories of his travels. He, like many others from the village, had had to learn more than one language, (sometimes up to four languages), in order to be able to communicate and trade with the other ethnic groups in this region (also see Harrisson 1954:119). Sitting near the *tetel* (hearth) weaving his *bekang* (baskets), he either narrated or sang these stories to me. Stories of journeys made by him and many other *Tepu'*, *Tama'* and *Sina'* in the Highlands, and their interactions with the other communities in the region fascinated me, and eventually become part of the reason for my interest in this research.

The dynamic relations of exchange that had existed for a very long time among these various communities excited me because they implied that the rugged mountains encircling my home were passable. The Kelabit, it seemed, for a very long time have traded with the Kayan, Kenyah, Berian, Potok, Kerayan, Murut, and even with the Malays, and later, with the Chinese, on the coast. These exchange relations were very important not only for the Kelabit, but also for the various other groups in the interior, as noted by Rousseau. He writes, "Indeed, trade played an important role in the social interaction between all groups; it took place not only between Malays and Dayaks, but also between the various groups of the interior" (1989:44).

However, for my grandfather and his Kelabit counterparts, their main social interactions in the past were with the Lun Berian, Lun Kurid, Lun Kerayan and Lun

[33] *Tepu'*, *Sina'* and *Tama'* are generic terms for grandmother/grandfather, *Sina'* for mother and aunts, *Tama'* for father and uncles. It is important to address members of the community accordingly, and to address each other according to age group, but most importantly, by blood relationship.

[34] Rubenstein (1991:140) defines *lakuh* as songs composed by a singer that are usually intensely personal and generally definitive as a result of having been developed over a long period of time, and which tend to completely describe a person's state of being at a particular time of crisis.

[35] *Lakuh*, *Sedadai* and *Benging* are traditional Kelabit songs.

Bawang, [36] and even now, most of my informants were able to understand and speak the dialects of these various groups. The Kelabit and these groups are considered to be both culturally and linguistically closely related. In fact, there were "occasional intermarriages between these people especially between politically influential families" (Talla 1979:2). As such, due to their close cultural and linguistic ties, there have been attempts by various scholars to categorize these groups as one single unit. For example, LeBar (1972:153) used the term "Kelabitic Murut" to refer to the Kelabit and these related peoples. At other times, researchers like Douglas, Harrisson, and Hose (Talla 1979:4) have classified the Lun Berian and Kerayan as Kelabit, also a classification based on linguistic and cultural ties between these groups.[37]

These cultural ties and especially the trade relations between the Kelabit and these other peoples at one point were very important to the Kelabit, although there were few needs that they could not meet for themselves in the Highlands. The Kelabit are, or were, self sufficient, for they grew their own rice, processed salt from springs, and could gather and hunt for a living. Therefore, I personally saw very few reasons for my ancestors to have formed exchange relations with these other groups. Through stories and songs I heard from *Tepu'*, *Tama'* and *Sina'* in the Highlands, however, I soon realized that there are other purposes and meanings (not limited to the economic) closely connected to their trading. Like many other communities in Borneo, involvement in barter exchanges had a close association with a stratification system among the Kelabit. This system was strictly observed not only by the Kelabit, but also by the other communities in the region, and thus is considered to be an eminent social characteristic of communities in Central Borneo.[38]

Exchanges or barter trade relations were important since they were the only means to obtain much sought after valuables such as the *belanai* (jars), *ba'o* (glass beads), *tawek* (gongs), and other ornaments and prestige wealth that played a major role in shaping a person's social and political position among the Lun Kelabit. The role of these valuables, and especially the *belanai ma'un* in determining not only a person's social standing, but also that of the family, is aptly described by Talla:

> The possession of the *belanai ma un* (ancient holy jar) gives the family a prestigious position. The jar is a token of esteem for its owner's hereditary, ascribed leadership role, head hunting and ancestry, and industry and prowess. These are the insignia of rank possessed by the socially powerful, leader class. Without the *belanai maun* no family has full authority (1979:79).

Although economically, socially and politically essential, these valuables were almost impossible to find in Central Borneo. As a result, people had to travel great distances to trade for them. Drawing conclusions from stories I heard about *belanai ma'un*

[36] Like the Kelabit use of *Lun,* meaning *lemulun* (people), *Lun Berian* means the Berian People.

[37] It is noteworthy to mention that today the name *Lun Bawang* is used by people in the Trusan area of Sarawak and the Berian area in East Kalimantan. But officially, the people in the Berian area are classified by the Indonesian government as *Lun Dayeh-Kerayan* (Amster 1998:30). However, among the Kelabit, the people from the Berian area are referred to as *Lun Berian*, and the people from the Kerayan area as *Lun Kerayan*, while the people from the Trusan, Ba Kelalan, Lawas areas as *Lun Bawang*. I will stick to the Kelabit terms when discussing these various groups of people throughout this study.

[38] Rousseau (1990) suggests that social stratification, which has a close link with hereditary chieftainship amongst the peoples of Central Borneo, is one of the main features that differentiates them from the coastal groups. Although some of the latter, for example the Iban and Melanau, have developed the same structure, theirs is less elaborate. For further discussions and debates on the notions of hierarchy and equality among the Iban, refer to Sather (1996).

in the Highlands, there is enough evidence to support the idea that trading with people from the other parts of Borneo, and especially from the coast, was one important way to acquire the *belanai ma'un*, and also the other valuables. Due to the long distances, these trade missions were exceptionally challenging. They involved dangerous and arduous journeys, which required traversing rugged and rough terrain, crossing and recrossing rivers and streams, and climbing up and down high mountains and deep valleys. It was also dangerous due to occasional headhunting between villages or, on a larger scale, between different groups in the region.

Therefore, the roaming and the distant travel needed to carry out these exchanges were not only important as a means to obtain the much sought after valuables as mentioned above, but also strongly influenced one's social standing in the community. A person's social status was especially important for a community like the Kelabit that maintained a social hierarchy. This hierarchy, to a certain degree, has affected social mobility amongst the Kelabit. Therefore, activities that offered opportunities for social mobility or upgrading such as headhunting, raids and trading missions, were important venues for the establishment of one's social standing in the hierarchy. Harrisson (1954:119) described this: "Among the Kelabits certainly there is prestige associated with roaming and far travel. Many of the most intelligent specialize in long journeys trading to other people, hunting, or working jungle produce."

The close association of one's ability, particularly for men, to roam and travel far, to one's standing in the community is not just confined to the Kelabit or Kerayan communities in the Highlands. Rousseau (1988) mentions that among the other groups in Central Borneo, trade and travel are also closely associated with people of great influence, such as the chief. In fact, other communities, like the Iban highly esteemed these practices. The custom known as *bejalai* among the Iban, is a practice that encourages the participants to leave the longhouse periodically in order to seek adventure, wealth and prestige. This included trading missions where jungle products were collected and exchanged for highly valued antique Chinese jars, which subsequently would enhance their social standing (Kedit 1993).

In the case of the Lun Kelabit, Lun Kurid, Lun Bawang and Lun Kerayan in the Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands, sometimes barter exchanges did not happen through direct contacts with the coast, at least until the nineteenth century, but through a number of intermediaries, such as would occur in village-to-village trading. Harrisson (1954) notes that this kind of exchange did not necessarily involve people from the interior personally travelling down to the coast to trade or vice versa, but was a form of barter exchange that took place between villages. As villages or longhouses were typically built along the banks of rivers or navigable streams in Borneo, barter exchanges occured along the river, perhaps starting from an entrepot at the coast. It is not hard to imagine that by the time these valuables reached the Highlands, they might have been passed through an untold number of owners, over an untold number of villages, and, possibly over ran untold number of years.

This is a long process, but one of the possible ways taken by some of the most valuable wealth objects highly prized by the Kelabit and their neighbors in northeast Central Borneo. In fact, Harrisson (1954:109) suggests that the pots and jars in the Kelabit Highlands originated mostly from Brunei Bay in the south and moved up the

Trusan and Limbang rivers to end up amongst the Kelabit or Kerayan in the Highlands. It is possible that this might have taken hundreds of years, and might be one of the reasons why these items are so highly valued.

Another common way trading was conducted between communities was by establishing *tamu* (bazaars) inland. Traders from different communities or within the communities would meet at these designated places. This involved intervillage trade, which was a more common practice among the Kelabit than the other communities of Central Borneo (Rousseau 1990:161). This designated trading place was called an *apu'*, literally, a 'meeting point' (Talla 1979a:92) among the Kelabit. Talla describes this as a place located midway, where goods such as cattle and jars were exchanged between two longhouses or villages. The *apu'* was not only designated for intervillage exchanges, but also for intracommunity exchanges and interactions. For example, a river named Pa' Labid, [39] where there was an old Kelabit settlement, but is presently uninhabited, at one point was a well-known meeting place for Kelabit to trade with the Lun Kayan and Lun Kenyah in the Baram region. The Kelabit exchanged their *tudtu'* (salt), *nateng* (resin), *uway* (rattan), and *siguk* (tobacco) for *tungul* (machetes), *bigan* (bowls) and *ba'o* (beads) from the Kayan, Kenyah and others.

Besides trading with the Kayan and Kenyah in the Baram area, the Kelabit conducted most of their non-intervillage barters with the Lun Berian, Lun Potok, Lun Bawang and Lun Kerayan in the east. Salt, tobacco, resins, and sometimes, rice, were some of the goods exchanged. However, it is important to note that both the groups trading, and the items exchanged, have varied over time. For example, in the late nineteenth century, both the Kelabit and Kerayan in the Highlands traded with the Kayan, Kenyah and Chinese in the Baram region in the west, and less with the Potok and the Berau in the east. This was perhaps due to Marudi's growth as a commercial center in the region during this era (Goldman 1968: 54-64). This variation also can be seen from the types of items in demand. While rattan was the main trade article in the late nineteenth century (Rousseau 1989:44), according to one of my informants, rendered cooking oil made from pig's lard was in demand in Marudi during the Japanese Occupation.

Regardless of era, the essential articles traded, for example between the Central Borneo and coastal areas, were various jungle products (Rousseau 1989:44). These products included birds' nests, camphor, various kinds of wild rubber, medicinal products, bezoar stones, mats, rattan, swords, baskets, etc., which were exchanged for the much sought after articles mentioned earlier. And most of these items were either carried in baskets on the traders' backs or put in dugout canoes, which were common ways to transport goods except in the Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands, where carrying products in baskets was the standard way of transporting things until the introduction of airplanes and motorcycles.

Another common occurrence that affected trading was the practice of tribal warfare and headhunting, very common practices in Borneo, including Central Borneo, at one

[39] Other writers like Talla (1979a) and Amster (1998) suggest that the term "Kelabit" derived from *Pa' Labid*. A story was told that a group of Kelabit went down to Marudi to pay their taxes. Charles Hose (the Baram District Officer at the end of the nineteenth century) asked his Kayan guides where these people came from. His guides replied, "*Pa' Labid*," which Hose heard as "Kalabit." Henceforth, the people of Pa' Labid and beyond came to be known as the Kelabit.

point.[40] During periods of warfare, trading was suspended and resumed only when opportunity permitted. Thus, objects of value were only slowly moved along from place to place. In fact, Harrisson (1959b: 25) suspects that some of these items took 500 years to go from Brunei Bay to the Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands through this process.

Unlike warfare in the modern sense of being a political act for gaining territory or control over a group, headhunting was carried out in order to obtain heads for religious gain and/or prestige (Rousseau 1990:264). Other scholars, like Rousseau 1990, Hose and McDougall 1912, and Metcalf 1996, have studied the sociological or ideological aspects of these warlike activities in Borneo, and so I do not intend to elaborate on them in this monograph. But what I seek to point out is that these activities, like trading missions, were venues for members in the community, particularly for the men, to roam and travel great distances, which has been important for the establishment or strengthening of one's social position. This has been particularly so for the proving of a leader's competency and courage to lead his village. In fact, for the Lun Kelabit, Lun Berian, Lun Kurid, Lun Bawang and Lun Kerayan in the Highlands, the ability to wage war, lead raids, and gain plunder is an attribute of an aristocrat, and is one of the qualifications for leadership. This is also true among the Iban (Kedit 1993), Kayan and Kenyah (Rousseau 1990).

Intervillage disputes and intertribal warfare sometimes would erupt from minor incidents, but could lead to raids, plundering and headhunting, and sometimes a cycle of counter-raids.[41] I heard and collected many stories of this kind when doing fieldwork in 1995, [42] and one of them relates the origin of intertribal warfare between the Kayan and Kelabit. It was told that two Kelabit friends were having an argument over the name of a plant, which led to a fight, consequently killing one of them. The victim's family took revenge by killing the other person, which in turn caused the latter's family to ask help from another village to avenge that death. This subsequently ignited an intervillage dispute, which caused one of the villages to seek help from the Kayan people to avenge the other village. The latter avenged the attack from the Kayan, which caused the Kayan to take revenge on that village. There were many casualties as a result. Then, more villages joined the original villages to take revenge on the Kayan. This ended up as a cycle of raids and counter-raids that came to an end only when a compensation of slaves and jars was given.

Many oral traditions and tales amongst the Kelabit as well as the Kayan people[43] recount the importance of valuables such as jars, brassware or even slaves for resolving cycles of counter-raids between these groups. The community leaders resolved conflicts by paying with valuables. Accordingly, a leader or chief needed to possess or control these objects or slaves in order to be able to pay ransom or compensation when needed.

[40] Gory as it may be, King (1993:26) suggests "headhunting and inter-village feuds" to be an "expression of political relations" that existed between the peoples of Borneo, specifically in the interior.

[41] However, typically, people in the past could not headhunt or declare war against people along the same river. This was true not only for the Kelabit, but also for the Maloh people in West Kalimantan (King 1985:79). Ideally, people on the same river joined together either to attack or to defend themselves against outsiders, or their enemies. This was mainly because rivers played important roles in defining the social interactions between people. In fact, it is very common for people of Borneo to identify themselves in geographical terms, and especially by rivers, or sometimes by valleys and mountains. In this context, residential location, and not an ethnic, cultural or national identity, are important to identify a person.

[42] Some of these stories were narrated to me in great detail, but, for various reasons, I will not relate them here.

[43] For an example of a Kayan story, refer to Usun Ngau (1968).

At other times, peace pacts have been initiated through marriage alliances, and these alliances normally involved people from the upper class such as the chiefs. Some stories I have heard indicate how vicious cycles of raids between the Kelabit, Kerayan and Kurid were stopped through marriage alliances between aristocratic families. This is a means to form political bonds between the leaders. For example, a political bond was formed between the villages of Pa Kabak and Pa Umur through the marriage of Retung Balang and Pun Ratu Dedtur.[44] This marriage has prevented intervillage feuds not only between the people from these two villages, but also between other neighboring villages.

In addition to intertribal marriages and other alliances, it is the people's constant movement, and not so much any homogeneity of language, place of living, ideology or even religion, which, channeled through economic, political and religious networks, gives the island its coherence. As mentioned earlier, these travels created political links among the highland peoples and to the outside world, which, in turn, created diversity and complexity of cultures, places and identities in the region. This has been further complicated by the presence of the permanent international boundary lines now drawn between the three nation states on the island of Borneo—-Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

[44] There are many instances of other marriage alliances initiated between members of upper class families. And some of these stories indicate occurrences of marriages between the Kelabit and the Kayan people as a means to bring to an end intertribal disputes and cycles of counter-raids between these two groups.

CHAPTER THREE

The Kelabit: The Situation

Lakuh

Lakuh are Kelabit traditional songs composed by singers, usually women, to "describe completely a person's state of being at a particular time of crisis" (Rubenstein 1991:140). Rubenstein suggests that these songs are usually "intensely personal, and generally definitive as a result of being developed over a long period of time." The following *lakuh* by Ngelinuh Karuh[45] reflects some of Rubenstein's claims. In 1970 Rubenstein recorded and translated this *lakuh*, and on May 16th 2001 I had the pleasure to listen to Ngelinuh Karuh singing and narrating the same *lakuh*.[46] There are some obvious changes or additions and modifications.[47] However, her intent and intensity remain - to lament and complain of the personal loneliness and solitude she feels as a result of her children leaving the Highlands to live in the cities and towns. Ngelinuh Karuh is now in her 70s, and still lives in the Kelabit Highlands with her husband, Pun Besara'. Her *lakuh* goes like this (my 2001 translation):

1 *Legku sinih gurap* (This thunder clangs)
2 *Pirud doo tudo tuih lem takep* (Silently nicely I sit in the kitchen)
3 *Neh ngabin uih Toni, anak doo atek* (Putting on my lap Toni, a good child)
4 *Anak bire Tuan inan liat-liat* (A child given by God to be happy with)
5 *Ngae teh uih neh mudur na'am mawan raseb* (Slowly I stand up without a sound)
6 *Neh ngukab bubpu' dalan edto mirat* (Opening the door for the sun to appear)
7 *Mupo me la'ud uih lem tana' belad* (I look downriver over the flat lands)
8 *Lem tana' baleng kelunan udat* (In the fertile land where *udat* [48] grows well)
9 *Kelunan pade udung rumpaad* (Where rice grows evenly at the same height)
10 *Bawang Kelayan dulun let ngilad* (A place trodden by people from times past)
11 *Bawang pitan sakai pelamud irat* (A place visited by visitors from all over the place)
12 *Ulit neh lem burur kuh neh tekap-tekap* (Suddenly in my soul I search)
13 *Mirat ebpa mateh tutu' neh teh pek* (Tears from the eyes drop with a drip)
14 *Ebpa matah tutu' me luun lekab* (Tears drop onto the sarong)
15 *Luun kelibung tajung pelikat* (Onto the sarong *tajung pelikat*)[49]

[45] Sina' (Aunt) Ngelinuh Karuh (Supang Lilling) presently lives in Bario Asal with her husband, Pun Besara' (Abu' Luang/Kasau Raja'). She was born and brought up in the area, and has 8 children and 23 grandchildren. All her children and grandchildren are now living in urban areas in Malaysia, except for one who lives overseas.

[46] I want to sincerely thank Sina Ngelinuh Karuh for sharing her *lakuh* with me. She narrated the song to me under the candlelight in Bario Asal on May 16th 2001. After her, Sina' Sekanan eagerly narrated and explained the meaning of her own *lakuh*. The following morning at the coffee shop at the airport, Sina' Doo Ilah also eagerly shared her *lakuh*, and afterwards asked why I hadn't called the other women the previous night to share their *lakuh*. They were so eager to share their *lakuh*, something that is most personal to them, that I felt deeply touched and honored.

[47] Rubenstein's translation is given at the end of this chapter.

[48] A kind of wild ginger plant that grows well in the fertile plains of the Highlands, especially by the riverbanks.

[49] *Tajung pelikat* is a type of sarong distinguished by the intricate designs on it.

16 *Tekap me selinuh kuh ngarawe anak* (My mind wanders, thinking of my children)
17 *Ngarawe Temabu' ideh dinganak* (Thinking of Temabu and his siblings)
18 *Nange neh ideh buro la mibal apad* (They have all moved over the mountain range)
19 *Buro me mulun lem bawang mikat* (Left to live in a difficult place)
20 *Mulun lem bawang na'am kinanak* (Living in a place with no siblings)
21 *Na'am teh tesineh inan palap iat* (Without a mother to comfort them)
22 *Kesikanan ayu kedi tauh ngilad* (Remembering our time in the past)
23 *Ridtu' me lem lati' pela'ud natad* (The time when we farmed downriver)
24 *Me ngerabut uduh nuk pelaba mapet* (We went to pull the weeds that were overgrown)
25 *Uduh luan liyu pelaba mikat* (Weeds in the slippery soil very difficult to pull)
26 *Inih men nuk inan kuh da'at iat* (And that is why I am sad)
27 *Na'am ke teh linuh ngen edten mikat* (Cannot bear the thought of difficult tasks)
28 *Na'am teh nuk ru'en narih muli me ngelaak* (No one to ask to go back and cook)
29 *Ru'en narih me merin edteh da'un tedtak* (To ask to go and collect pumpkin leaves)
30 *Me ngalap da'un lem baling desat* (To collect leaves in the fertile land with *desat*)[50]
31 *Me ngalap kayuh tu'en pengelaak* (To collect wood for cooking)
32 *Ulit men legku sinih tuna-tuna* (Suddenly this thunder rolls)
33 *Legku ai-ai matun rami'a* (Thundering slowly towards the dawn)
34 *Tui lekedtang uih sembahyang muka* (Getting up early to pray in the morning)
35 *Neh mutuh Tama La'ih Tuan Alla* (Asking the Big Man Lord Allah)
36 *Mutuh ieh nulung narih ngen nuk rayeh-rayeh* (Asking Him to help in the big things)
37 *Medting ngen anak narih bulat matah* (Until all the children can open their eyes)
38 *Medting ngen mupun narih nuk duah* (To include the few grandchildren I have)
39 *Naru kamih milah maya' karuh iah* (To make us wise to obey His words)
40 *Bawang surga lem tana' rayeh* (Going to Heaven, a big place)
41 *Inan tauh menani ngubur Tuan Alla* (Where we sing praising Lord Allah)
42 *Ngubur Tuan Isut diweh deh ngetamah* (Praising Lord Jesus and the Father)
43 *Neh nebpa' lajang ka'ul nuk midteh* (Putting the water in the pot with one handle)
44 *Tekap selinuh kuh neh na'am bera* (My mind wandered about having no rice)
45 *Na'am men anak tu'en me tupeh* (There's no child to ask to pound [the rice])
46 *Ineh men pu'un kuh mirat ebpa matah* (That's when tears come out from my eyes)
47 *Ebpa matah tutu luun ta'a* (Tears from my eyes dripping onto my sarong)
48 *Luun kelibung barit pelima* (Onto the sarong with intricate designs)
49 *Idih beto' edto tanep temapa* (When the sun disappears)
50 *Ineh nepuun kuh pelaba tuseh* (That's when I begin to be troubled)
51 *Kesikanan ayu tauh deh ngesineh* (Thinking about us, mother and children)
52 *Ridtu' me lem ma'ud lem ba a rayeh* (When we went working in the big wet rice field)
53 *Me ngerabut uduh mapet pelaba* (To pull the very overgrown weeds)
54 *Uduh luun liyu mulun tuna-tuna* (Weeds constantly growing on slippery ground)
55 *Inih neh nuk inan kuh da'at awa* (Those are the things that haunt me)
56 *Da'at men iat kuh rupu' temuna* (It saddened me having to work hard)
57 *Na'am teh lun ru'en narih muli mageh* (There is no one to ask to go back early)
58 *Me naru' nuba' lem lajang edteh* (To make rice in the pot)

[50] *Desat* are wild plants that grow well by the riverbanks in the Highlands.

59 *Me ngalap da'un inan narih nenga* (To collect leaves for wrappings)
60 *Me ngalap kayuh lem pulung kura* (To collect wood in the deep jungle)
61 *Tulu men narih bebpi' binala* (If in case my words will be shortened)
62 *Renga narih me muli bulat lem mateh* (When I go Home with open eyes)
63 *Mai teh ada' mupun narih la pederah* (What a pity that my grandchildren will suffer)
64 *La' nu'uh a'un narih kereb ridtu' ineh* (Looking after what I have left at that time)
65 *Tulu teden uih nuk menu Ngeneh* (If only I have faith in Him)
66 *Mudur sebuleng na'am teh ideh tuseh* (I will rise alone and they will not be troubled)
67 *Mudur uih telupu na'am teh ideh dereh* (I will ascend up and they will not suffer)
68 *Inih neh paad lakuh kuh legku tuna-tuna* (This is the end of my *lakuh*, thunder rolls on)
69 *Awe edteh burur la kesikenan mala* (In case somebody remembers to say)
70 *Mala lakuh kudeh iah doo tuna-tuna* ("Why is she saying this *lakuh*?")
71 *Lakuh nuk binala kuh mirat ebpa mateh* (It's *lakuh* said with tears from my eyes)
72 *Nengelinuh anak nuk neh buro nedteh* (Thinking of children who moved and left)
73 *Menidun dih lakuh* (*menidun* (hornbill) this *lakuh*)[51]

Analysis[52] *of the* Lakuh

Ngelinuh Karuh's *lakuh* contains 73 lines in 9 logically divided units. The first four units are longer than the last five.

Unit 1(in eleven lines) speaks of her grandchildren and the pleasant setting of life in productive rice lands, located along the river of the central plateau. The only ominous signal is the crashing thunder coming from over the mountains.

Unit 2 (in ten lines) speaks of her personal pain depicted by tears dropping onto her sarong because her children have left this pleasant plateau and gone beyond the mountain.

Unit 3 (in ten lines) recalls life with her children in the fields along the river, pulling the weeds with difficulty, but returning to the security of hearth and meal.

Unit 4 (in eleven lines) opens with the continual rolling of the thunder while Ngelinuh Keruh recalls rising early to pray for her children and grandchildren with the hope of her life leading to Heaven, where she can be happy praising God the Father and Lord Jesus.

Unit 5 (in six lines) states that there is no rice for the child to pound, and no child to pound it – tears again fall on her sarong.

Unit 6 (in six lines) anticipates the darkness falling ominously, as there are no children to help pull the weeds in the rice field.

Unit 7 (in six lines) is the complement of the preceding units. Sina' Ngelinuh Karuh has no children to make meal preparations while she finishes the work in the fields.

Unit 8 (in seven lines) looks ahead to her death and the mourning of her grandchildren. Ngelinuh Karuh wishes that her pious life would transmit her directly to Heaven without death and mourning.

Unit 9 (in six lines) serves as the matrix or frame for Sina Ngelinuh Karuh's *lakuh* and states the reason she is singing it: her children have left. The ominous thunder continues.

[51] Commonly used to end a *lakuh* and indicates the end of the song.

[52] I want to especially thank my friend Steve Lancaster for his great help with this analysis. I am no linguist, but his expertise in the area and his deep interest in *lakuh* have been a tremendous help and encouragement.

Every line in the nine units of Ngelinuh Karuh's *lakuh* is unambiguously clear as it communicates the feelings and concern of an aging woman who has lost her means of security because her children have left the village. It is the repetitions in her *lakuh* that expose the main concerns of her song—-"no child and no rice." Table 1 clearly depicts this.

TABLE 1
Analysis of Topics of Ngelinuh Karuh's *Lakuh*

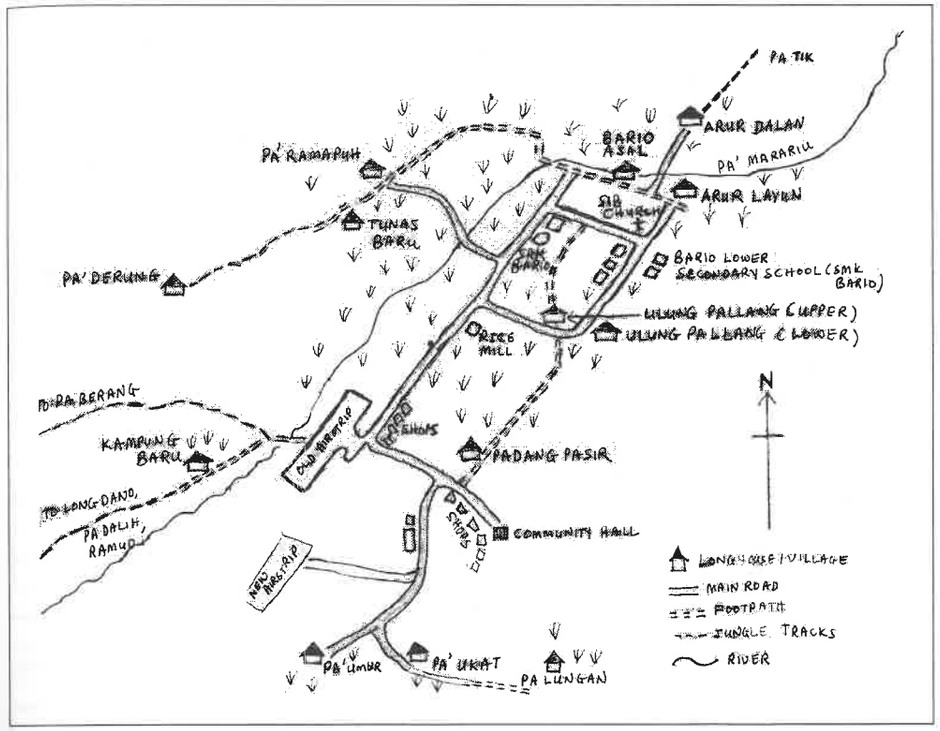
Unit	Topics						
I	Thunder	Downriver Rice land	Grandchild Grandchild				God-given
II				Children	Tears, Tears Sarong, Sarong		
III		Downriver Weeds Weeds	Sad			Cook Leaves Leaves Wood	
IV	Thunder Thunder		Grandchildren	Children			Prayer Heaven
V				**No rice** **No child**	Tears, Tears Sarong, Sarong		
VI		Rice fields Weeds Weeds	Sad	Mother Children			
VII						Back early Make rice Tears Wood	
VIII			Grandchildren				Home to Heaven without death
IX	Thunder			Children	Tears		

Besides that, the *lakuh* contains complex plays on Ngelinuh Karuh's spatial and temporal points of reference, which also reflect the main focus of the *lakuh*. Ngelinuh Karuh's world is divided into the secure, Heaven, the familiar and the beyond. This play on deixis (Ngelinuh Karuh's points of reference) helps to establish the context in which the *lakuh* was composed and which heightens the "awe setting" power of the song. Below is a brief analysis. But, before presenting this spatial analysis, I would like to orient the reader to the plateau/valley, which is mostly surrounded by mountains, with a stream running from the west to the east. Please refer to the sketched diagram below.

"Deixis" is a linguistic term used to describe those features of language which refer directly to the personal, temporal or locational characteristics of the situation within which an utterance takes place, and whose meanings are relative to the point of view of the speaker.[53] Thus, it refers to an orientation in time and/or space from the perspective of the speaker. In Ngelinuh Karuh's *lakuh*, there are two main deictic centers: the *tetel* (hearth) and the *lati'* (rice field). The hearth provides the first diectic center and the rice field provides the second deictic center for Ngelinuh Karuh.

[53] For extensive discussion on the notion, refer to Levinson, Stephen C. (1983) and/or Brown, Gillian and Yule, George (1983).

FIGURE 1
A Sketched Map of the Plateau



Deictic Center	Assignment	Location
1.Hearth	0^a	is Ngelinuh Karuh at the hearth
	1^a	is the verandah in the longhouse
	2^a	is the rice field
	3^a	is the plateau
	4^a	is the mountain
	5^a	is beyond the mountains
2.Rice Field	0^b	Ngelinuh Karuh is in the field
	1^b	is her children gathering leaves and wood
	2^b	is her children preparing the rice at the hearth in the long house

The first deictic center, the hearth, is where Ngelinuh Keruh would be most likely to sing her *lakuh*. The hearth represents the security in her life - where the family members eat together, warm themselves and enjoy family time.[54] However, the tension builds as she looks beyond the hearth deictic point 0^a to the verandah 1^a and beyond, to the rice fields 2^a and plateau 3^b. She thinks of pleasant times in the past when all was as it should be. She thinks of her adult children who have left to live beyond the mountains, and now live lives of great difficulty or hardship and have no mother near to help and

[54] Janowski's (1991) work on the place of rice among the Kelabit provides good information on the importance of the *tetel* (hearth) to the Kelabit community.